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**Negotiating Womanhood in Palestinian Memoirs:
Historical Archives on Identity, Politics, and Gender**

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INTRODUCTION

Exploring “Palestinianness”

It is widely accepted that women’s political participation is fundamentally important and thus should be encouraged and upgraded in national and international politics. Political participation is a milestone for every society and signifies development, progress for the state, and equality for the citizens.¹ One cannot speak of progress in a society when the majority of women are excluded or face restrictions with regards to their political engagement and participation in demonstrations or decision-making processes.² The successful political involvement of women has a profound impact on the guarantees of the developmental plans and policies of a state in general and of a functioning government in particular. According to statistics,³ a remarkable amount of women worldwide face discrimination and restrictions in terms of participating within a society. Political participation in particular seems to be limited to men, while there are many women who are willing to take action and aim to change or criticize particular governments or policies that directly affect them in their societies. Apparently, the role of women and their political activity within a society indicates progress, prosperity and thus powerful citizens.⁴

In Palestinian society, where the majority of political activities are credited to be conducted by men, the majority of women have narrow possibilities of political engagement and participation not only in

¹ Jan E. Leighley, “Attitudes, Opportunities and Incentives: A Field Essay on Political Participation,” *Political Research Quarterly* (Sage Publications Inc. March, 1995,) 181-209.

² UN Women, “Women’s Political Participation,” *Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation*, (accessed date: February, 2015,) <http://palestine.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Alina Rocha Menocal, “What is political voice, why does it matter, and how can it bring about change,” *Political Voice and Women's Empowerment*, March 26, 2014, Development Progress, (accessed date: February 2015,) <http://www.developmentprogress.org/blog/2014/03/26/what-political-voice-why-does-it-matter-and-how-can-it-bring-about-change>.

politics but also in the job market.⁵ The decision-making process in Palestine has moreover given little opportunities for women to take action and become part of international negotiations let alone national politics. Yet during the first *Intifada* (uprising) in 1987, vast numbers of women appointed themselves and embraced the idea of a collective Palestinian consciousness, and thus they founded numerous charitable associations and women's organizations, aspiring to promote peace between Israeli and Palestinian women and peace initiatives. Through this activity, women directly or indirectly contributed to the creation and promotion of a robust civil society, in the absence of a Palestinian state.⁶ According to Suad Joseph, women presumably engage more than men in political practices and initiatives. "Because of their position on visiting networks," writes Joseph, "[Palestinian women] perform important emotional roles and help create social solidarity. They may gather and pass on information to their male friends and partners; persuade and cajole men to join factions; and/or act as decoys and dramateurs; thus, women link factions, kin, and political groups. They did this in addition to performing important social rituals, holding families together and preserving social interaction."⁷

Yet the many stories of Palestinian women activists are often sidelined and commonly misrepresented or neglected in documentaries, television shows, and news media; many news headlines present Palestinians in general as fueling ongoing conflict with Israelis and/or actively inhabiting a troubled land held within the grips of a deep-seated conflict. The typical explanation is as follows: Palestinian civilians challenge Israeli occupiers through militant attacks, and the Israelis, on the opposing side, react in ways to

⁵ Viola Raheb, "Wasted Talent," *Discrimination of Women, Development and Cooperation*, July 15, 2011, (accessed date: February, 2015), <http://www.dandc.eu/en/article/palestinian-women-are-well-educated-do-not-find-good-jobs> .

⁶ Dunya Alamal Ismail, "Palestinian Women's Political Participation," *Arabglot*, Saturday, November 2, 2013, (accessed date: February, 2015), <http://www.arabglot.com/2013/11/palestinian-womens-political.html> .

⁷ Suad Joseph, "Women and Politics in the Middle East," *Middle East Report* 138, Volume 16, (January/February, 1986.)

counterbalance the severity of the conflict.⁸ The reasons and origins for Palestinian struggles are claimed to have reached specific boiling points during two *Intifadas* in Palestine, in 1987 and 2000, and analysts often discuss the long-lasting consequences of these two periods for both Palestinians and Israelis. There are numerous reports elaborating the impact of the conflict on the future peace processes and talks, examining the brutal practices and response of the Ariel Sharon government.⁹ Many contributors provide first-hand reports from the frontlines of the conflicts during the second *Intifada*,¹⁰ from the streets of Jerusalem and Gaza, to refugee camps in Lebanon and schools on the West Bank. Yet in much of these presentations, very few Palestinian voices, especially from political activist women, are heard or given a platform to explain their side, to chronicle events from their perspectives, and more so to discuss how gender issues are impactful in the construction of Palestinian identity.¹¹

As Suheir Azzouni, a prominent Palestinian activist and consultant in Women's Affair Technical Committee, contends, "Women currently face two major types of obstacles to their rights, those arising from within their own culture and society, and those imposed as the result of occupation, war, and civil unrest."¹² The writings of Palestinian women's activists offer compelling narratives of determined women

⁸ Or Oded Even, "How Israel's media show us only half the picture in Gaza," *Haaretz*, June 7, 2015, (accessed date: July, 2015,) <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.664613>. See also, Miron Richard, "Media self-reflection on Gaza war coverage is necessary but unlikely," *Haaretz*, September 1, 2014, (accessed date: July, 2015,) <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.613518>. See also, Sucharov Mira, "Why is the media obsessed with Israel?" *Haaretz*, The Fifth Question, November 19, 2014, (accessed date: July, 21015,) <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/the-fifth-question/1.627148>.

⁹ Stephanie Gutmann, *The Other War: Israelis, Palestinians, and the struggle for Media supremacy*, (United States: Encounter Books, 2005.)

¹⁰ *Intifada* means "uprising" or "rebellion" and refers to two major resistance movements of the Palestinians against the Israelis, in 1987 and 2000 respectively.

¹¹ Carey Roane, Chomsky Noam, Svirsky Gila and Weir Alison, *The New Intifada, Resisting Israel's Apartheid*, (U.S.A.: Verso, October 17, 2001.)

¹² Suheir Azzouni, "Palestine," *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress amid Resistance*, (New York, NY: Freedom House, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), (accessed date: February, 2015,) https://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Palestine%20%28Palestinian%20Authority%20and%20Israeli%20Occupied%20Territories%29.pdf.

who engage in national politics and hold strong ties to their communities, but also are knowledgeable about equally important struggles for gender equality in interrelated political and social domains. For prominent Palestinian women who partook in the building of several peace organizations, preserving and safeguarding Palestinian identity is prominently featured in their memoirs, through storytelling techniques that convey how they experience and remembered key historical events also endured life under political occupation. For Hanan Ashrawi, Raymonda Hawa-Tawil, Suad Amiry and Sumaya Farhat-Naser, for example, who all happen to be Christian Palestinian and were treated as “peripheral” members of the Palestinian political elite of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, their memoirs offer a unique archive of a gendered “Palestinianness,”¹³ a term expressing the proclamation and exaltation of a multifaceted identity that has historically been questioned, negated, ignored and/or neglected in the last fifty years by not only powerful members within the international community, but also by their male counterparts and family members.

Thesis Project: Engaging Gender Issues through Memoirs as Historical and Personal Archives

This thesis is concerned with Palestinian political activism from the perspectives of four Palestinian women. In an attempt to shed light on their contribution to Palestinian national politics and how they uniquely understood gender politics, this thesis studies the ways in which each author, according to their memoirs, manages to demolish and eradicate gender bias and discrimination on behalf of their male compatriots. Furthermore, this study seeks to understand how these authors used political activism through participation in national politics against the Israeli occupation in order to reach more gender equality, before, during, and after the two Palestinian uprisings in 1987 and 2000.

¹³ Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997,) 139.

Notably, gender equality between men and women refers to the view that both should receive equal treatment and be equally promoted to issues such as economic independence, payment of work of equal value, equality in decision-making process, dignity and ending of gender-based violence.¹⁴ Through a thorough examination of particular passages and quotes from the four memoirs and the messages that they convey, alongside fundamental and pre-eminent theories of leading academicians and analysts, this study highlights the significance of an emerging gendered Palestinian identity.

According to social identity theory,¹⁵ one's sense of self consists of personal and social identities. Social identities represent identification with various groups in society and therefore are affiliated with a sense of belonging into a particular nation or community. Such is the case for Palestinian women, who by acquiring a gendered political identity, distance themselves from their male compatriots and stress the importance of their struggles under the umbrella of a common Palestinian identity.¹⁶ The passages and excerpts that have been chosen for this thesis mainly concern the emergence and preservation of a gendered Palestinian consciousness, the active political involvement of Palestinian women as well as the limitations that patriarchal Palestinian society has set for these women, who by going against social norms, they (Palestinian women) remained committed to the national liberation struggle.

These four women, as shown in the memoirs, were actively engaged in national politics, liberation movements, and political initiatives and as a result they managed to make their voices heard amidst a male-dominated political scenery. This study aims to prove that personal and experiential writings are able to provide a different account on the historical events and facts in the making of the modern Palestinian state, before and during the two *Intifadas*, from women who significantly contributed to peace negotiations

¹⁴ United Nations Population Fund, <http://www.unfpa.org/gender-equality> .

¹⁵ McLeod Saul, "Social Identity Theory," *Simply Psychology*, (accessed date: June, 2015,) <http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html> .

¹⁶ Simona Sharoni, "Gendered Identities in Conflict: The Israeli-Palestinian Case and Beyond," *Women's Studies Quarterly* Vol. 23, No. 3/4, *Rethinking Women's Peace Studies* (Fall - Winter, 1995,) 117-135.

by focusing on the development of a gendered identity. Thus, it aims to investigate how have these four Palestinian women authors contributed to the construction of a Palestinian identity by promoting civil and human rights and questioning patriarchal relations in politics and in the home. In this thesis, I ask: what role might these memoirs have in not just chronicling their life and experiences, but in developing a gendered political identity for Palestinians? Moreover, a way to answer how have these four Palestinian women authors contributed to the construction of a gendered Palestinian identity, is to explore through their own personal accounts, the efforts, sufferings, initiatives and achievements related to the construction of a national identity and a political awareness as well as Palestinian community's political initiatives, engagement and political history.

Importance of Thesis Project and Structure

This thesis contends that Palestinian women produced a gendered political identity, by transforming their national identity into a banner of resistance, through activism and political engagement in the Palestinian liberation struggle. Thus these women created their own political mentality and space wherein they were able to express their opinions and make their voices heard on political matters. Gendered Palestinian identity identifies as the identity which is owned by women who have intervened and contributed significantly in politics and against the occupation. Furthermore, as this study argues, Palestinian women have played a significant role in the Palestinian national liberation struggle and that has led to the development of a new form of resistance to the Israeli occupation. In examining four Palestinian-authored memoirs, written by women who have experienced the consequences of the occupation and decisively became activists of the Palestinian cause, this thesis aims to investigate how issues related to identity, political engagement, family structure and gender roles are unfolded and discussed through particular personal accounts alongside narrative techniques.

In an attempt to illustrate the significant role of the eyewitness actors of key historical events throughout the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, this study inquires upon and analyzes *This Side of Peace* by Hanan Ashrawi,¹⁷ *My Home My Prison* by Raymonda Hawa Tawil,¹⁸ *Daughters of the Olive Trees* by Sumaya Farhat-Naser,¹⁹ and the *Sharon and My Mother in Law* by Suad Amiry,²⁰ out of a collection of fifteen Palestinian-authored memoirs. The four above mentioned memoirs have been chosen for this thesis due to their distinctive and remarkable narration of events, experiences, emotions as well as for the messages that they convey and the issues they raise towards Palestinian identity, women's activism and life under the Israeli occupation. These four authors uniquely manage to touch upon how they have constructed an alternative Palestinian identity through political participation that involves promoting refugee rights and human rights causes under Israeli occupation – matters that are all crucial to their efforts, as a community, to make their voices heard and for their struggles to be recognized and attended to on a diplomatic level. Furthermore, their memoirs illustrate the ways in which these women efficiently managed to synchronize the political engagement with their daily gender roles in the Palestinian community. However, these memoirs describe the occupation as a “state of mind”²¹ that will come to an end, through reciprocal compromises as well as the will to accept or understand the “other,” the Israeli side, is apparent in those personal accounts. All of these memoirs constitute a corpus of the Palestinian literature, and as this thesis contends, the authors manage to transform the trauma and the hardships,

¹⁷ Hanan Ashrawi, *This Side of Peace*, (New York: Touchstone Simon and Schuster, 1995.)

¹⁸ Raymonda Hawa Tawil, *My Home My Prison*, (London: Zed Press, 1983.)

¹⁹ Sumaya Farhat-Naser, *Daughter of the Olive Trees*, (Germany: Lenos Verlag, July 22, 2014.)

²⁰ Suad Amiry, *Sharon and my Mother-in Law: Ramallah Diaries*, (London: Granta Books, September 19, 2006.)

²¹ Tawil, 242.

experienced by many within the Palestinian community, into a radical and active political engagement and intervention, as a way to work on and improve the Palestinian cause.²²

This thesis also treats and integrates these women's memoirs, which are experiential and autobiographical forms of writing, as part of a distinct literary genre, wherein several aspects and methods of narration are observed, such as the authors' point-of-view, narration style, speech and tense. Notably, these four memoirs share some of the aforementioned techniques: firstly, the first person point-of-view as to who is the narrator of the story; and secondly, the direct narration where the author speaks directly to the reader. A combination of the direct and reported speech is encountered throughout the four particular accounts, where in the former the characters speak for themselves and also include dialogue and quotations, and in the latter the narrator summarizes what the other characters have said and done. At last, the tense, which informs us about when the story takes place during intermixing past, present and future moments of the authors' lives.

Throughout this study and alongside the integration of memoirs as the primary source of analysis, regarding the construction of Palestinian women's consciousness, it will become apparent that Palestinian women have always been an active part of the political and national liberation struggle. Dominant narratives on Palestinian identity and women's participation will be contested through each woman's recounting of first-hand experiences and memories of historic events. Ultimately, this study contends that these memoirs should be considered as equally important as academic and political writings on the Palestinian struggle, for the authors are valuable correspondents of historical events. Due to the fact that Palestinian women's voices of women have been intentionally or unintentionally silenced or ignored by scholars, authors and analysts, this thesis treats their stories and reflections as principal. The authors share common perspectives on the oppressive past and history of the country, the preservation of their identity,

²² Matthew Abraham, "Seeking Palestine: New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Summer 2013,) 90-91.

as well as they are able of testifying to the events occurred, and they present themselves as fighters and not as victims of the occupation. Moreover, each author takes on issues of gender equality, in terms of political participation, representation and active intervention in peace negotiations, international conferences and national politics, as crucial and central to their identity formation. The thesis will delve into their memoirs, analyzing those particular passages that evince their response to male dominance in the Palestinian political scene as well as in international peace negotiations.

After providing a brief introduction of each author in the next section, the thesis will turn to its core four chapters, each of which surveys how these four memoirs, when treated as examples of a literary genre, function as an archive of events, characters, incidents, and policies concerning the Palestinian struggle. The narrative techniques used by the authors, coupled with scholarly writings on national consciousness and gender issues, will be examined in order to show how the notion of “Palestinianness” is no longer treated as just a political identity, but also is told and re-imagined through relationships at home and at work—whereby women attempt to preserve their family lives and the gender roles, while at the same time they face limitations that their families impose on them, gender-based discrimination at work and at home, as well as of the efforts in preserving an identity and add to national and self-determination.

The first chapter focuses on the literature review and includes the analyses of scholars such as Joseph Massad, Rashid Khalidi, Julie Peteet, Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh and others. Notably, historians Khalidi and Massad have provided a useful framework for this thesis given their substantive analyses and theories on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the construction of Palestinian identity. Sociologists and anthropologists Julie Peteet, Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh and Maria Holt offer ethnographic analyses and field research, providing first-hand accounts of politically active Palestinian women. They discuss how women’s political engagement can be understood through alternative forms of activism, such as maternity and mourning.

Chapter two examines the subject of Palestinian identity, its construction and preservation and the notion of “Palestinianness,” discussing how Palestinian women perceive this notion and how the works of Massad, Said and Khalidi are integrated into the messages that the four memoirs are conveying. Moreover, in the same chapter there is a section that explores, through a brief history of women’s political engagement in Palestine, the efforts and battles of the Palestinian women who, in defiance of the cultural norms of their society, managed to leave their marks on the Palestinian political scene. This is followed by chapter three, which focuses on the prominence of family institutions within Palestinian society and provides some insight into societal norms and gender expectations. At last, chapter four draws the conclusion of the study by providing answers to the research questions and by considering the implications of the findings for future research on the gendered Palestinian identity as developed by women activists in Palestine.

Introducing the Authors: Ashrawi, Tawil, Farhat-Naser, and Amiry

The study begins with Ashrawi, a well-known scholar and activist who was an official spokesperson for the Palestinian Authority (PA) from 1991 to 1993, and is currently a scholar at Bir Zeit University. Originally from the West Bank, she became involved in numerous movements and demonstrations for Palestinian rights; she identifies herself as a political activist and a legislator for the Palestinian Legislative Council for Jerusalem and the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen’s Rights in 1993. She was also a member of the PLO Executive Committee when she resigned in protest of political corruption, when she disagreed with Yasser Arafat’s handling of official peace talks, in particular during the Wye River Memorandum agreement in October 1998. Second is the memoir of Raymonda Hawa Tawil, a Christian Palestinian from Acre and a journalist and writer. As the mother-in-law of Arafat and the granddaughter of the owner of the Montfort citadel in Akka, Tawil suffered attacks and mistreatment by Israeli authorities

because of her active political involvement against the Israeli occupation. She spent a period of four months under house arrest and some time in jail.²³

The author of the *Daughter of the Olive Trees*, Sumaya Farhat- Naser has received many distinctions for her leadership and managerial skills in peace organizations and women's associations as well as participated in numerous international peace conferences. Originally from Jerusalem and born in 1948, she obtained a doctoral degree and based her academic career at Bir Zeit University. At one point, Farhat- Naser was eagerly involved with politics and activism, both in the domain of women's rights and during peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. She was the director and manager of the Palestinian Jerusalem Center for Women and the Global Fund for Women in San Francisco, amongst others.²⁴ Lastly, Suad Amiry, the Ramallah-based architect and author of the fourth memoir that this thesis will examine, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law*, was born to Palestinian parents in 1951 in Amman, Jordan. Amiry participated in several peace initiatives, in which both Palestinian and Israeli women were working towards dialogue and reconciliation; she was also a member of the Palestinian peace delegation in Washington D.C., between 1991 and 1993. Moreover, until 1991 she held a position in Bir Zeit University, and she is the founder and the director of the Riwaq Center Architectural Conservation, for the preservation of the Palestinian architectural heritage.²⁵

Specifically, in Ashwari's *This Side of Peace*,²⁶ the author begins her narration during 1967, when she was a student in Beirut and lived away from home, due to the Israeli occupation that denied her application for a permit to return. Her life as an activist for Palestinian human rights led to her rise in

²³ Adonis, "Fighting from the inside: Who is Raymonda Hawa Tawil?, The Pasionaria of Nablus.", *Adonis Diaries*, Posted on June 10, 2011. (accessed date: February 20, 2015.) <https://adonis49.wordpress.com/2011/06/10/fighting-from-the-inside-who-is-raymonda-hawa-tawil-the-pasionaria-of-nablus/> .

²⁴ Farhat-Naser.

²⁵ Amiry.

²⁶ Ashrawi.

politics, becoming actively engaged in the peace process and negotiations. The author concludes with the frustration and disappointment she felt while she was the official spokesperson of the PA,²⁷ and had to balance between not only Israelis and Americans but also among her colleagues. Her personal life plays a key role in her struggle for balance in a life between politics and activism and the role of the mother and wife. The structure of her text provides the reader with a sufficient understanding of the events occurred.

Such is the case for Sumaya Farhat-Naser's memoir, titled *Daughters of the Olive Trees*,²⁸ which is a personal narration of events after the Israeli withdrawal from Ramallah in 1995, describing the emotions and hopes of people struggling to accept the new conditions and rules in a familiar/old environment. Then, she deploys the activities of women's (of both sides) organizations for peace and the complexities involved in their talks. She continues with the description of facts occurred between 1998-2000 when the author is having close relationships with Israeli members of the "Jerusalem Link" organization but soon realizes that the gap between them not only as friends but also as nations, hinders every attempt of reconciliation and progress. The author concludes with the events leading up to the second *Intifada* in 2000, where she realizes that the task she was bestowed with, cooperation with the Israelis for peace and ultimate reconciliation with the acceptance of the two states as equals, was hard to achieve.

Furthermore, the memoir of Suad Amiry, titled *Sharon and my Mother-In-Law: Ramallah Diaries*,²⁹ appear to incorporate two equally significant narrative styles. First, the strict narration of the plot as regard to events such as the first Palestinian uprising in 1987 until the second in 2000 and the several and continual incursions of cities, such as Ramallah, the city in which the author dwells. Second, the author's choice to narrate the story in an entertaining and sometimes humorous way/style, provides the reader with curiosity and intimacy in regard to the characters and their personalities. Amiry's memoir is

²⁷ Palestinian Army.

²⁸ Farhat-Naser.

²⁹ Amiry.

again a personal narration of the events occurred in 1982 with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, continues with the events of the first and the second *Intifada* (uprising) in 1987 and 2000, and finally until 2003 with the establishment of the Separation wall. The author unfolds the story of herself and her family in Ramallah, the city in which the authors' lives and works, by deploying everyday incidents occurred between the author and the family members, such as her mother in law and her husband, between Israeli soldiers and officials and herself. Amiry begins her description of events with the emotions felt and her thoughts on Israelis and occupation, when she decides to visit her parental house in Jaffa, where a Jewish family is living now, and there the entrance is not permitted to her.

The author feels a constant frustration and anger towards Israeli officials and their bureaucratic restrictions, which are, as Amiry supposes, aiming to hamper Palestinian citizens. She encounters many troubles getting her documents checked by Israeli soldiers, in the checkpoints, while she drives from city to city inside Palestine or when she departs or arrives in the airport of Tel Aviv. Later in her description, explores the constant military curfews that were imposed in several cities and in Ramallah as well, and there she navigates the reader into a common Palestinian "journey", the one with numerous curfews, constraints and deprivation of human rights. The author emphasizes the mixed emotions of anger, anxiety and frantic laughter, when one finds himself secluded in a home for days. It is worth noting that Amiry dedicates a part in her memoir to discuss the Women's Day celebration in March 8, in Palestine and specifically how the Ramallah Women's Day demonstration turns out to be a huge anti-Occupation demonstrations of 1992. The memoir concludes with a contemplation of Ariel Sharon's words on the plan of occupying Palestine as a whole, and namely as a "pastrami sandwich," there the author "responds" with irony on the effect of the initial plan.

The fourth memoir titled *My Home My Prison*,³⁰ written by Raymonda Hawa Tawil, has a profound sentimental effect on both the reader and the author, due to the fact that Tawil undergone several imprisonments, arrests, police interrogations and attacks by Israeli military authorities. The author's personal narrative of life in Israel, West Bank and Jordan during 1960's and late 1970's, represent the author's defiant faith in the Palestinian self-determination efforts and the desirable construction of two states solution for Palestinians and Israelis. Tawil is instilled with principles of feminist pedagogy from her mother, who despite being a Palestinian born in the America, her emancipated spirit and mind was quickly transmitted to her children. Moreover, she became a symbol for militant Palestinian nationalism, and as a peace activist with relatively good relations with the Israeli activists. In her memoir the author narrates the tragic events of a land being occupied three times, in 1948, in 1967 and in 2002, while she was struggling with occupation officials and the Palestinian society, in which a woman with a strong voice, who stands up and disagrees with men and authority, is a danger if not a shame.³¹

Finally the memoir concludes with author's release in 1976 after three months of house arrest, where Tawil contemplates whether freedom is possible inside an occupied country and what makes a woman free or emancipated inside a male-dominant society and marriage. In the meantime, the establishment of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) in 1963, among other activities and initiatives, served as a political alternative and innovation for all those who gathered to form the national movement for Palestine, before the genesis of an official government, at least in a national level, had taken shape and negotiations began. After addressing what the four memoirs are discussing, the next section focuses on how these four authors took part in politics and what was their contribution. In order to provide answers to the research question on how have these four Palestinian women authors, contributed to the

³⁰ Tawil.

³¹ Aviva Lori, "Married to the Revolution," *Hareetz*, December 31, 2010, (accessed date: February 22, 2015,) <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/magazine/married-to-the-revolution-1.334519> .

construction of a gendered Palestinian identity, several quotes from the four personal narrative are included and examined.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

This chapter begins with a discussion of memoirs and then segues into how memoirs as a literary genre are important in narrating a personal memory and experience. The discussion of memoirs and their significant role in keeping a record of historical events as lived by individuals who have borne witness and experienced them, follows a review of the existing literature on Palestinian women and Palestinian identity and their roles in the Palestinian national struggle. The works of prominent political scientists, anthropologists and historians are reviewed and their arguments and findings pave the way for a larger discussion on the key issues that this thesis explores. The key point of this thesis, which is the construction of a gendered Palestinian identity, will segue into larger discussions on women's societal roles, patriarchy, and female political participation, each of which will be analyzed in the following chapters.

Notably, the works of Rashid Khalidi, Joseph Massad, and Edward Said offer a theoretical introduction for how this thesis will investigate Palestinian women's active political role, the construction of a gendered national identity and their contribution in the national liberation struggle of Palestine. According to Refaat Alareer, the existing literature on the Palestinian community, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Palestinian identity as well as politics of the region and personal records of Palestinian and Israeli people, is heavily dominated by descriptive, rather than empirical research. Thus scholarship in the disciplines of gender studies and anthropology will provide for and situate the above-mentioned argument of this study. Scholars such as Julie Peteet, Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, Maria Holt, Sherna Berger Gluck, Rabab Abdulhadi and others discuss Palestinian women's position and roles in Palestinian society as well as against the Israeli occupation.

Memoirs as a Distinct Literary Genre

As historian George Egerton described in his article “Political Memoirs as Poly-genre,” political memoirs or diaries constitute in part “forms of contemporary historiography: by nature they each address a past which lies within the personal memory of the writer.”³² Namely, Armenian-authored memoirs or Kurdish-authored writings describe events experienced in the past, and seek to provide information of historical transformations of their nations due to wars and conflicts, to collect the personal records of people who have a word on the events and facts, which have affected their communities and have occurred in their nations-states, as well as to pass it down to the next generation.³³ Conversely, Palestinian-authored memoirs are distinguishable from other ethnic community’s writings, due to the unique character of their themes, messages and plots in a more than seventy-year struggle for international recognition of their community and state-building, and, as this thesis discusses, the preservation of their national identity. The Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the life of the people are part of a deeply rooted and long-lasting Israeli occupation that is worthy of analysis, especially from the perspectives of its female political pioneers.

Edward Said in his 1984 essay “Permission to Narrate”³⁴ underscores the power to communicate one’s own history, through a narration of some of the key events in Palestinian history. Said’s essay is central and similar to what the four Palestinian authors produce and create through their memoirs. By collecting, sharing and communicating one’s memories, one’s experiences and the history of a homeland, one ultimately creates a discourse and a space within which one is able to narrate and chronicle the events occurred in your life, as an individual as well as a citizen of a land. Said stresses the power of

³² Egerton George, “Political Memoir as Poly-genre,” 233.

³³ Silverman Sue, “The Courage to Write and Publish Your Story: Five Reasons Why it’s Important to Write Memoir,” *Numero Cinq Magazine*, Vol.2, No.9, September 2011, (accessed date: June 20, 2015,) <http://numerocinqmagazine.com/2011/09/24/the-courage-to-write-and-publish-your-story-five-reasons-why-its-important-to-write-memoir-by-sue-william-silverman/> .

³⁴ Edward Said, “Permission to Narrate,” *London Review of Books*, Vol.6, No 3 (February 16, 1984,) 13-17.

communication, which he contends that Palestinians were lacking of this opportunity and they were denied of the international media attention.³⁵ He writes about the story of the Palestinians and their plight right after the War of Independence in 1948, and paints the picture of a world, which he describes as “hypnotized,” by the dominant West and Israeli discourse and Zionist narrative of an empty Palestine.³⁶ Said’s work is fundamental for this study, due to the similar key issues that alongside the four memoirs are addressing, such as the importance of disseminating information on major events that remain unpublished and the progress and achievements of the Palestinian community in the liberation struggle.

Palestinian memoirs in particular present multifaceted perspectives and reflections on political and social issues, from voices not typically acknowledged in official and public discourses. Detailing one’s life story is like taking part in a highly intimate and confidential act yet in a public forum, wherein the individual confesses an experience that might have stigmatized his/her life. Generally speaking, personal narratives, captured in the form of a memoir or diary, are often the result of a stream-of-conscious writing, reflecting much more than individual stories. They also reflect dynamic –and little known aspects of— community life, alternative lifestyles, and ongoing political debates, while at the same time conveying individual reflections about how major public events impact ordinary, daily lives. According to G. Thomas Couser, a professor of English at Hofstra University, memoirs are “life narratives” or “life representation” forms of writings that in turn refers to “all the forms in which human lives get inscribed or represented, whether public or private, written or graphic, print or electronic, static or interactive. And the forms are constantly evolving and proliferating.”³⁷ Scholars such as Dawn Latta Kirby and Dan Kirby contend that

³⁵ Said, 16.

³⁶ Ibid. 14.

³⁷ G. Thomas Couser, “Why Memoir Matters,” OUPBlog, Oxford University Press’s, *Academic Insights for the Thinking World*, February 27, 2012, (accessed date: February, 2015,) <http://blog.oup.com/2012/02/why-memoir-matters/>.

memoirs are a distinct literary genre,³⁸ thus they can be studied and analyzed the same way as poetry, fiction, and drama,³⁹ through an analysis of the narrative techniques and the rhetorical choices of the authors.

Yet others, such as Egerton and Michael Steinberg, argue that memoirs do not necessarily constitute a literary genre; they are instead more of a “creative nonfiction” form of writing.⁴⁰ Moreover, as Couser notes, “Memoir suffers from the sense that it does not quite belong among genres whose creativity can be taken for granted. As a literary genre, memoir suffers from an inferiority complex.”⁴¹ Furthermore, memoirs are regarded as the genre which “best represents our individualistic, egalitarian ethos,” and “make visible lives that once were lived in the shadows or were considered not worth living, let alone writing.” According to professor of literature Nicole Jodarski, memoirs can be understood as reading one’s “truth from another person’s perspective.”⁴² In them, a “wide variety of perspectives of truth as written in the memoirs”⁴³ enables the reader not only to identify him/herself with diverse authors and situations but also to provide information in regard to “personal truths,”⁴⁴ of many different people, as confessed and compiled into a book. For memoirs in general can be studied as the “literary form of something most of us

³⁸ Dawn Latta Kirby and Dan Kirby, “Contemporary Memoir: A 21st-Century Genre Ideal for Teens,” *The English Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (March, 2010), 22-29.

³⁹ G. Thomas Couser, “Why Memoir Matters,” OUPBlog, Oxford University Press’s, *Academic Insights for the Thinking World*, February 27, 2012, <http://blog.oup.com/2012/02/why-memoir-matters/>.

⁴⁰ Egerton, George, “Politics and Autobiography: Political Memoir as Poly-genre,” (Hawaii: University of Hawai’i Press, summer 1992, (accessed date: December 18, 2014.)

⁴¹ Couser.

⁴² Nicole Jodarski, “Memoir Unit,” <http://www.d.umn.edu/~lmiller/TeachingEnglishHomePage/TeachingUnits/MemoirUnit.htm>. (accessed date: December 10, 2014.)

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

engage in, actively or passively, most of our lives and even after our deaths.”⁴⁵ Additionally, they are significant when they produce a “shared discovery,”⁴⁶ as literary critic Neil Genzlinger argues, which means that the numerous historical events that have occurred, are chronicled by authors or scholars, and they are recounted by people who have a unique word on the facts.

Additionally, simple narrations of events do not constitute a valuable plot for memoirs. Studying and analyzing memoirs lays the first stone in “how to appreciate difference, foster a desire to understand others, and practice empathy.”⁴⁷ As Jodarski has observed, memoirs tend to “create the truths that define their author’s life,” and most of the time, seek to “define the moments in someone’s life,” in an attempt to attribute importance to the characters’ experiences. Throughout their writings, they produce and present their own opinions and experiences, ones that they share with family members and their communities. This is achieved, in part, when individual authors use narrative techniques, such as backstory, imagery, oxymoron, jargon, metaphor,⁴⁸ in order to stimulate for the reader one, a profound meaning, and two, a different conceptualization of political events and of highly charged issues.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Couser, “Why Memoir Matters,” OUPBlog, Oxford University Press’s, *Academic Insights for the Thinking World*, February 27, 2012, <http://blog.oup.com/2012/02/why-memoir-matters/>.

⁴⁶ Neil Genzlinger, “*The Problem with Memoirs*,” (January 28, 2011,) http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/books/review/Genzlinger-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁴⁷ Jodarski.

⁴⁸ Connie Warner, “Narrative Techniques in Writing: Definition, Types & Examples,” Writing Courses, *Study.com*, (accessed date: March, 2015,) <http://study.com/academy/lesson/narrative-techniques-in-writing-definition-types-examples.html>.

⁴⁹ Phillip L. Hammack, *Narrative and the Politics of Identity: The Cultural Psychology of Israeli and Palestinian Youth*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011,) vii.

Examining Palestinian Identity

In Issam Nassar's article "Reflections on Writing the History of Palestinian Identity,"⁵⁰ he argues that the Palestinian national identity is an example of the diversity of historical narratives, whose complexities and effects are particularly compelling and momentous in the Palestinian context. Namely, Nassar argues that "it is not only that Palestinians form a national group whose very existence is often questioned by Zionist denial. There are also internal contradictions inside the Palestinian discourse itself, partly because the discourse emerged out of historical processes that were often intended precisely to prevent its emergence. The construction of a modern Palestinian identity points to a number of challenges and contradictions that simultaneously produced it and made it ambiguous."⁵¹ Thereupon, he discusses the current situation and status of the Palestinians, stating that "today, even fervent proponents of Arab nationalism accept the existence of different Arab identities, while Palestinians are generally recognized by the international community, and even by Israel, as a people."⁵²

Nazmi Al-Jubeh, in his article "Palestinian Identity and Cultural Heritage,"⁵³ suggests that is difficult to present one Palestinian identity due to the fact that an identity or the identities of a particular society can be multi-dimensional. For him, the word "Palestine" is ambiguous, and there are numerous interpretations of it, owing to the geographical, cultural, ethnic, religious, and other kinds of sub-identities that one encounters within the Palestinian society.. Al-Jubah contends that the origin of the name of Palestine "was derived from the name of a group of people, the 'Philista,' who settled in the Iron Age,

⁵⁰ Dr. Issam Nassar is an associate director of the Institute of Jerusalem Studies, associate editor of Jerusalem Quarterly File, and associate professor of History of Al-Quds University. He is author of Photographing Jerusalem, see <http://www.pij.org/authors.php?id=458> . Issam Nassar, "Reflections on Writing the History of Palestinian Identity," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, Vol. 8, No 4, and Vol. 9, No 1, 2002/ National Identity.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Nazmi Al Jubeh, "Palestinian Identity and Cultural Heritage," *Temps et Espaces En Palestine*, (Beirut, Lebanon: Presses de L'ifpo, 2008,) 205-231.

along the shores of Palestine, their origin (Aegean or Semitic) have been disputed among scholars. Therefore, the southern coastal strip (today's Gaza Strip) in Assyrian texts (eighth century B.C.) was called 'Pilaschtu.'⁵⁴ Herodotus extends the term 'Palestinian Syria' to the entire coastal strip between Phoenicia and Egypt. The Greek term 'Palestine' was then transferred into Latin: 'Palestina.'⁵⁵ Another interesting viewpoint on Palestinian identity and its intricacy has been formulated by professor of social ethics, Herbert C. Kelman. In his article, "The Interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities: The role of the other in existential conflict,"⁵⁶ Kelman discusses the view of the "other," as a threat for the existence of one, through a socio-behavioral narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as by exploring the emergence and importance of the Zionist movement and the way that has been introduced in the everyday lives of the Palestinian people. Kelman's analysis provides a different approach over the view of the "other," referring to the Palestinian identity and community, as the source of one's own negative identity elements. He suggests that the nature of the conflict, in our case the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is the number one factor that impedes the development and the ultimate reconciliation between these two distinct ethnic groups. Moreover, it (this unusual nature of the conflict) holds back the two sides from seeing what they have in common and how they can benefit from these elements that this peculiar coexistence could produce.

Kelman mainly proposes ways of creating a dialogue of the two groups/sides that would lead to a bigger discussion of the positive or negative elements in the identity of each other and the ultimate development of a transcendent identity for the two that will be based on the common elements of interdependence. Acknowledging that the Israeli –Palestinian case is a protracted and deep -rooted

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Nazmi Al Jubeh, "Palestinian Identity and Cultural Heritage," *Temps et Espaces En Palestine*, (Beirut, Lebanon: Presses de L'ifpo, 2008,) 205-231.

⁵⁶ Herbert C. Kelman, "The Interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities: The role of the other in existential conflict," *Journal of Social Issues*, 1999, 553-600.

conflict, which during 1948, with the first Israeli settlements and the concurrent eradication of the Palestinians, the contact of the two peoples was characterized as/by negative interdependence. Moreover, he suggests the pursuit of common goals and elements of each other's identity and the desire for a single-status state without two conflicting and unequal groups, which will create the basis for cooperation as equals and even a sustainable long term peace. He rejects the particularistic identities and seeks for an effective cooperation for their coexistence, by arguing that sticking to the particularistic identity of one and its distinctiveness, one is avoiding the opportunity of creating something transcendent and ultimately reach a political solution without threatening each other.

Moreover, Kelman discusses methods of implementing a transcendent identity and concludes that the exclusiveness that both groups demand and therefore impedes the development is a major factor of the nature of this conflict that should be taken into consideration. To sum up, the themes of destruction, physical annihilation and nonexistence are crucial to one's understanding of the significance and maintenance of national identities. The following quote of his article summarises his critique on how these two distinct ethnic groups can achieve an equal-status identity through workshops and open dialogue. In addition, he suggests that their authorities should identify and agree upon what unites and what divides these two communities and focus on the common and positive elements of this coexistence. The intergroup conflict as Kelman's field of study, appears to be a common theme among populations and it is related to the reinforcement of nationalism. Kelman wrote this essay in 1999, before the second *Intifada*, so the events described cannot fully cover the Israeli-Palestinian conflict issue. Particularly, he states, ““...long term solution of the conflict requires development of a transcendent identity for the two peoples that does not threaten the particularistic identity of each.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Herbert C. Kelman, “The Interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities: The role of the other in existential conflict,” *Journal of Social Issues*, 1999, 583.

Furthermore, as the psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson successfully described in his work *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, the issue of identity is of high importance due to the fact that it provides every person with a social standing and thus the person feels alive, particularly, “in the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity.”⁵⁸ Rashid Khalidi and Joseph Massad examine Palestinian political identity and attempt to investigate which factors and motivations led to the deep-seated conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*,⁵⁹ Khalidi discusses the strategies and mechanisms applied in the “troubled” and “questioned” territories and towards Palestinians, mainly by Israeli and American authorities, in an attempt to define and determine either the borders of this land, its population, and even its historical existence.⁶⁰ Khalidi contends that Palestinian identity is not a unilateral key feature of the Palestinian community;⁶¹ Palestinian identity and nationality are one of many constructed identities and possess multilayered elements. For instance, Palestinians identify themselves as Muslims, Christians, Arabs, Ottomans, members of tribes and families at the same time.

Moreover, Khalidi analyzes the series of failures and successes regarding the defensive stance that the Palestinian-Arab associations and the self-governing institutions of Palestine took during the years of the British mandate (1918 to 1948) and continued to take after the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, which marked the mandate’s end and the establishment of the state of Israel. In addition, he mentions the “final status issues”⁶² that beset not only the Palestinians who reside in Israel and in the Occupied Territories, but also

⁵⁸ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1968,) 130.

⁵⁹ Rashid Khalidi, a Palestinian-Lebanese American historian of the Middle East and professor at Columbia University and author of the book, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.)

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 208.

the Palestinian community, which is scattered around the world. Khalidi contends that construction of a Palestinian consciousness has been marginalized and preserved throughout the years (1918-1964 with the PLO's founding). For him, this identity is not a fixed element for the Palestinian community, but rather a constructed notion, woven from multiple narratives,⁶³ just like any other identity. By examining the Palestinian elite and grassroots activism among the peasants and farmers, from the time of the Zionist arrival in the late 19th century and the rapid land conquest thereafter, Khalidi argues that both groups began to formulate a Palestinian identity. Peasants in particular became radicalized and became politically conscious, challenging their occupiers by rejecting their forceful dislocation and displacement. However, an introduction to the notion of "Palestinianness" which encompasses the Palestinian sense of unity and identity is required, before delve into the analysis.

An interesting reference to the feeling of being or belonging to the Palestinian community is located in Khalidi's usage of the term "Palestinianness," which he describes as being inherited and innate in every Palestinian.⁶⁴ He argues that acquiring or being associated with a particular identity enhances one's collective memory and creates a sense of belonging and therefore existing. "Palestinianness" stands for the emergence, construction, and sustenance of the Palestinian identity and stresses the strength of this particular identity. Moreover, this term encompasses notions such as Arabism, local loyalties, and feelings of patriotism, as they were developed by Palestinians over the years. He however refutes the idea that Palestinians used nationalism as a response to the Zionist movement; on the contrary, the scholar exalts the feeling of belonging to a particular community and land, Palestinian and Palestine respectively, as well as protecting one's identity.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid., 237.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 206.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

In a collection of essays published in 2006 entitled *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians*, Joseph Massad discusses the impact of anti-Semitism, racism, nationalism and colonialism in order to illustrate and chronicle the roots of the conflict as well as to provide the reader with a sufficient background of the Israelis and the Zionist project.⁶⁶ Massad provides “a genealogy” of what came to be constituted as the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, and through these essays he sheds light on how the discourse of terrorism constructs its subjects and objects. The essays focus on “Zionism’s conception of culture and race as central to its ideological and practical aims as well as its policies toward all the groups over whom it exercises power, whether they be Jewish or Arab.”⁶⁷ Namely, Massad recounts the peace processes and policies on behalf of the Palestinian authorities and discusses their disappointing results and repercussions.⁶⁸

Furthermore, he focuses on the Palestinian question, not only as a national question for the people of Palestine and their historical existence, but also as a land question, one related to the region and its borders.⁶⁹ He claims that the “question” of Palestine, regarding the identity issue, land borders, the violation of the Palestinian human and political rights and the occupation of the land, has persisted, due to the fact that it is linked to the Jewish Question and not separated, mainly due to the history and the sufferings of the Jews in the past. Thus Massad proposes that this link between these two distinct ethnic communities, Palestinians and Israelis, is key to understanding the nature of the conflict and of the possible resolutions. He states that “the same way that ‘man’ and ‘woman’ define themselves reciprocally (though

⁶⁶ Joseph Massad, “Zionism, anti-Semitism and Colonialism,” *Al Jazeera*, December 24, 2012, (accessed date: March, 2015,) <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/12/201212249122912381.html> .

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁸ Joseph Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on the Zionism and the Palestinians*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 98-100.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

never symmetrically), national identity is determined not on the basis of its own intrinsic properties but as a function of what it (presumably) is not.”⁷⁰

Moreover, Massad explores the two founding documents of the new generation of Palestinian nationalists, which are considered significant because they depict for the first time the nature of the Israeli occupation. These are the Palestinian National Charter and the Palestinian Nationalist Charter, where these two were functioning as a constitution, due to the fact that they were defining for the first time, the Palestinian political goals, the Palestinian rights, as well as the notion of “Palestinianness.”⁷¹ As is highlighted in the introduction of the *Palestinian Nationalist Charter*, “The Zionist conquest of Palestine is presented as a rape of the land. It views Palestinians as the children of Palestine, which is portrayed as a mother. The Zionist enemy is clearly seen as masculine, and the wrong committed by this enemy to Palestinians is considered metaphorically to be of a violent sexual nature.”⁷² This particular quote reveals aspects of the character and the nature of the occupation of Palestine, by viewing the Zionist arrival and establishment to the land as a “rape” committed by the Zionists in 1948, through colonization and land acquisition, which culminated with thousands of Palestinian to be expelled and displaced from their homes and land. Furthermore, the above quote informs about the emotions, as experienced by the Palestinians, in view of the Zionist practices and toward their land’s predicament and future.

Another avenue to investigate is the intertwined role of the construction of the Palestinian identity and the development of a Palestinian political consciousness. Fundamental to this study is Said’s *The Question of Palestine*,⁷³ which provides answers to three major questions concerning who are the

⁷⁰ Ibid, 43.

⁷¹ Palestinianness stands for the sense of belonging into the Palestinian community worldwide, but also means the sustenance of the Palestinian identity.

⁷² Massad, 44.

⁷³ Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, (New York: Vintage Books Editions, 1992).

Palestinians and the land of Palestine, who are the Zionists and what is the Zionist project and lastly, whether there are future possibilities and perspectives for Palestinian self-determination. Notably, Said is interested not only in the history of Jewish settler-colonialism in the Middle East and its effects on Palestinian people, but rather more about the critical stance that one takes in front of this long-lasting issue of a land and of its people. He manages to deconstruct prejudices and negligence on handling the issue, as a Palestinian exile himself, by taking into consideration both sides, Israelis and Palestinians, which is in accordance to what the authors of the four memoirs are interested in and have accomplished through their narrations.

Yet when Said explores and elaborates on who are the Palestinians, one understands that the word exclusion encompasses all the negative aspects of the Palestinian people, the land of Palestine and the Palestinian identity, mainly due to the fact that the Palestinians were those who were excluded from their land and prevented from having rights.⁷⁴ Said claims that “there is ample evidence to show that taken altogether as members of a community whose common experience is dispossession, exile, and the absence of any territorial homeland, the Palestinian people has not acquiesced in its present lot. Rather the Palestinians have repeatedly insisted on their right of return, their desire for the exercise of self-determination, and their stubborn opposition to Zionism as it has affected them.”⁷⁵ Said at this point discusses the exclusion and dispossession experienced by most Palestinians, which have cultivated a self-conscious community. These sentiments are also highlighted by each author of the four personal narratives that this thesis studies.

The aforementioned works of Khalidi, Massad and Said are central to this research not only because they tackle issues relating to Palestine and Palestinian community’s struggle for self-

⁷⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 47.

determination, but they provide an initial framework for how gendered Palestinian identity can be perceived to operate within women's community as well as the construction and preservation of this identity through its many developments. *The Question of Palestine, The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on the Zionism and the Palestinians* and *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* pave the way for the analysis of the construction and preservation of the Palestinian identity and the notion of "Palestinianness" as discussed above and similarly elaborated by the memoirs' four authors.

On the contrary to the aforementioned works on Palestinian identity, community, and activism, Mitchell Bard, an executive director of the nonprofit American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, in his book titled *Israel Matters: Understand the Past, Look to the Future*,⁷⁶ presents a different view on the Palestinian identity issue and existence of the land of Palestine in general. Bard claims that there is no evidence for Palestinians to be related or to be descended from the Canaanites, and belonging or owning the land known as Palestine. Furthermore, Bard elaborates on the idea that the Palestinian community, began to grow only after the establishment of the Jewish state in the early twentieth century, due to the economic opportunities created by the Israeli authorities and Jewish immigrants as well as the developments in the healthcare system. As a matter of fact, Bard disregards the historical existence of the land and of the people, who were living there, as well as the culture that the Israelis encountered, upon their mass arrival in 1948. The author suggests that the Palestinians arrived in the land known as Israel, from Saudi Arabia and traces their origin to the seventh century, and swept into nowadays Palestinian territories. Another interesting point of Bard's research is the way the Palestinians are presented in comparison to Israelis.

⁷⁶ Dr. Mitchell Bard is a director of the Jewish Virtual Library, editor of the *Near East Report*, a foreign policy analyst, and author of another twenty three books and holds a Ph.D. in political science from UCLA, see Biography, Mitchell Bard, <http://www.mitchellbard.com/mbbio.html> . Mitchell Bard, *Israel Matters: Understand the Past, Look to the Future*, (Los Angeles: Behrman House Publishing, 2012).

In Bard's analysis, the Palestinians are described only through reference to *Hamas*⁷⁷ and *Fatah*,⁷⁸ the two main Palestinian militant groups and political factions, respectively, while Israelis are presented as peaceful and ordinary people who have been victimized and have suffered during the Second World War and currently asking for their right to return to the land of their origin and ancient homeland. Lastly, Bard explores the meaning of the words: "Israel," "Palestine," and "Palestinians," through several historical archives, which serve as an evidence for the existence of Palestinians before the Israelis. Bard is seeking answers to issues related to the history of the land, long before the arrival of the Israelis as well as he questions the construction of the Israeli and Palestinian identity. Similarly, and as the power and influence of the dominant Israeli discourse is also illustrated in this study versus the personal accounts and truths of Palestinian people, is interesting to refer to two essays, which document and express the Israeli situation and side of the conflict and of the historical background of the two ethnic groups involved. Namely, in "The Jewish Situation" and "Whosoever Blesses Them: The *Intifada* and its Defenders"⁷⁹ written by Larry Miller, there are several points and issues that the author raises, related to the usage of the word "Palestine" and "Palestinians" when one refers to the land and to the ethnic community, and suggests that there is no such thing as "Palestinians" by referring to historical records and archives in order to prove his point. At last, he discusses the privileges and advancements of the Israeli state and authorities versus the "predicament" and no efforts of the Palestinian community, to form and build their nation-state.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Hamas, an acronym of Islamic Resistance Movement, is a Palestinian Islamist political organization and militant group in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Zack Beauchamp, "Everything you need to know about Israel-Palestine," *Vox*, November 21, 2014, (accessed date March 26, 2015), <http://www.vox.com/cards/israel-palestine/hamas>.

⁷⁸ Fatah is a major Palestinian political party, founded in 1965 as the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, by a group of Palestinian exiles. Pierre Tristam, "What is Fatah?" *About News*, (accessed date March 26, 2015), <http://middleeast.about.com/od/palestinepalestinians/f/me080323.htm>.

⁷⁹ Larry Miller, "Whosoever Blesses Them: The Intifada and its Defenders," *The Weekly Standard*, The Blog: April 22, 2002, (accessed date: April, 2015), <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/001/161yaihr.asp>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Much has been written about Palestinian identity from historians and political scientists, but the scholarly sources on women's contributions are lacking. At this point, it is necessary to include research from social scientists who discuss gender issues, which allow for a more nuanced discussion about not just women's political participation but also about the importance of an emerging national identity, which unites Palestinian men and women and facilitates their efforts.

The discussion of gender roles and family structures in Palestinian tradition and society are tackled in academic discussions about the roles of women, mothers and activists in the Palestinian struggle. Such is the case for Julie Peteet, whose ethnographic essay “Icons and Militants: Mothering in the Danger Zone”⁸¹ concerns the representation of Palestinian motherhood and womanhood, offering a counterpoint to media reports that typically describe Palestinian women as having a single occupation and role that of mothers who celebrate the death of their martyred sons who died in battle against Israeli forces.⁸² Peteet describes how a culture of resistance and the forms of political consciousness are born and take shape. Namely, Peteet discusses the concept of ululation⁸³ to enter into a larger conversation about nationalism and nationalistic awareness alongside the “maternal sacrifice” discourse, in which no agency, meaning the capacity of an individual to act independently,⁸⁴ is given to these women. Thus sacrificing their children is considered a nationalistic duty; it is embedded into the patriarchal context in which they

⁸¹ Julie Peteet, “Icons and Militants: Mothering in the Danger Zone,” (The University of Chicago Press: Signs, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Autumn 1997),) 103-129.

⁸² Ibid., 125. Particularly, Peteet’s research concentrates on Palestinian mothers living in dilapidated refugee camps in Lebanon and the West Bank. The author stresses the concept of ululation, which is often described as an act of celebrating mass deaths. Yet Peteet points out that, Palestinian mothers employ ululation at their son’s funerals, not due to the lack of significance they attribute to human life, but due to the fact that ululation is an actual sign of mourning, in cases of collective loss. In short, the fact that mothers cannot display their mourning and grieving publicly, does not constitute them as senseless or apathetic, towards their son’s death.

⁸³ Ibid. 126.

⁸⁴ Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theories and Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2003).

live. What is more, due to this lack of agency or limited agency, women had to distance themselves from critiquing or engaging in the Palestinian political movement.

Peteet's work provides a space in which she highlights the experiences of women in general and mothers in particular, to speak for themselves and narrate their personal stories and experiences. Through the personal interviews she conducted, Peteet comes across women's activists involved in the national struggle and discusses the gender dynamics of their involvement in a male-dominated interest and sphere. Through their stories, Peteet explores how social status impacts duties and obligations for different classes in the Palestinian struggle. She argues that female refugees living in camps felt compelled to "offer" their sons in the battlefield as a "sacrifice" for the Palestinian cause.⁸⁵ By contrast, women among educated, middle and upper classes were busily involved with the Palestinian movement and politically engaged in the struggle, and they criticized and dismissed the poor as too politically immature to participate. Peteet contends that Palestinian activists forgot about their compatriots living in refugee camps, who were fervently engaged and involved in the struggle, even after the loss of their children.

Similarly, another avenue to investigate the participation and the key roles of Palestinian women before and during the Israeli occupation, is through the research of Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh. In her work, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*,⁸⁶ Kanaaneh explores the reproduction and family planning policies in the Galilee region of Israel. Her work is relevant to this research because it tackles issues such as identity, the sense of belonging into an ethnic community, and collective memory of a particular group of people, in this case of Palestinians, that will be also examined in the following chapters of this thesis, through the memoirs. She examines the strategies and policies imposed by Israel on its Arab population to stifle and thus control the Palestinian population growth. Moreover, Kanaaneh

⁸⁵ Peteet, 124.

⁸⁶ Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (California: University of California Press, 2002.)

discusses Palestinians' assumptions⁸⁷ and attitudes over the modernization procedure and program of the Israelis, which includes the Palestinian community.

Through fieldwork analysis, she illustrates the life of Palestinian citizens residing in Israel who vacillate between their own ambivalent positions regarding their identity status on the one hand, and on the other hand, the modernization program that Israel introduces, through policies aimed at benefiting Israeli birth rates and decreasing the value of Palestinian needs and rights.⁸⁸ Specifically, she talks about the growing Israeli Jewish nationalism and the resistance of the Palestinians to the Israeli state's directions and policies. In this way, the Palestinians contribute to the creation of their own growing nationalism within Israel.

Alternatively, several scholars have reviewed the social, political role and position of Palestinian women in Arab society, during major transformative historical events, such as the two *Intifadas* in 1987 and 2000, the aftermath of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and also during daily life in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Rabab Abdulhadi, Sherna Berger Gluck, Suha Sabbagh, Samira Haj, and Maria Holt, discuss the efforts and the contributions of women in both the Occupied Territories and in refugee camps against the Israeli occupation. To commence, Berger Gluck argues that Palestinian women working on behalf of nationalist causes were active from the start.⁸⁹ Starting in 1917, urban women participated in demonstrations against the Balfour Declaration, and in 1920 they were included in a delegation that met with the British High Commissioner. One year later, "a group of educated, upper class, urban women-most

⁸⁷ Assumptions towards the reproductive and family planning policies and strategies of the Israeli government, in which Israel wishes to integrate Palestinians.

⁸⁸ See Kanaaneh. Through her analysis on the creation of health institutions and of the strategies on the bodies, she paints the picture of the key role of the political procedures, in the family planning of a community, and the reproductive ability of the population, in which these practices are embedded, and have as a result the control of population.

⁸⁹ Sherna Berger Gluck, "Palestinian Women: Gender, Politics and Nationalism," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 24, no. 3 (Spring, 1995,) 5.

of them connected to the male notables who led the nationalist movement-founded the Palestine Women's Union.”⁹⁰ Palestinian women were influential in resistance movements, in spite of the fact that they were living and acting within a traditional Arab society of the 1920's. In Berger Gluck's words, “The Palestinian used to be much more advanced in his own country and women were more independent and freer...but after 1948 this changed, in the camps the Palestinian became ultra-strict even fanatic about the "honor" of their women. Perhaps this was because he had lost everything that gave his life meaning and "honor" was the only possession remaining to him.”⁹¹ After the 1948 war, Palestinian women became increasingly restricted to domestic and reproductive roles, which emphasized raising children and taking care of their husbands. This irritated women who were politically active. Additionally hampering women's political aspirations and participation was the formation of the PLO leadership in 1964, whose positions of authorities and responsibilities were given and transferred to male politicians and bureaucrats. Palestinian women began to feel that their efforts, sufferings, gains and battles were threatened or completely disregarded by their male counterparts.⁹²

Furthermore, in the discussion of women political participants in Palestine, Maria Holt in “Palestinian Women, Violence and the Peace Process”⁹³ suggests that the overall war atmosphere and the daily conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians had placed numerous constraints on women's ability and opportunities to participate in the national liberation struggle. Holt states that Palestinian women are both the agents of violence and its victims. Due to the changing gender roles and women's position in Palestinian society, several freedoms, initiatives and movements were repressed by their male counterparts, and women were left with little or zero possibilities, of participating in official peace talks

⁹⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁹¹ Ibid., 7.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Maria Holt, “Palestinian Women, Violence, and the Peace Process,” *Development in Practice*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3 (May, 2003.)

and negotiations. They were also largely excluded from participating in the formation and building process of their new nation-state. In addition, gender roles and the position of women were challenged and suppressed, on account of both violence and of the major events that took place; as a result, this created many adversities and obstacles for the status of women, who all of a sudden were asked to return to their family roles and perform household chores.

According to Holt, from the beginning of the twentieth century, women were participating in “resistance” activities,⁹⁴ which included charitable and social welfare work, mainly by groups of upper- and middle-class women. It was after the British mandate of Palestine when women began to participate in demonstrations against the British authorities and policies. Holt argues that their frequent participation in “demonstrations signified their willingness to engage in ‘unladylike’ and even violent behavior, thereby defying cultural norms that prescribed limited public visibility of women.”⁹⁵

Ongoing violence and the transformative events changed the reality of the region, having a strong impact on women. For many Palestinians, the *Nakba* in 1948 meant “the loss of a country and home and a refugee status were akin to the loss of a loved one...losing Palestine, in the words of one exile, was like losing a husband or a son.”⁹⁶ Yet this event did not stop women from fighting for both their civil and political rights. From the events of the British- administered Palestine in 1918, until the outbreak of the second *Intifada* in 2000, Holt states, “The last 50 years, Palestinian women have struggled for greater access to education, for the right to work, for broader participation in the political process, and for the

⁹⁴ Holt, 227.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 228.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

realization of their rights as human beings. They have been both courageous and outspoken...external aggression and repression from within has marginalized women's organizing.”⁹⁷

In the same manner, Rabab Abdulhadi, professor of Ethics, Race and Resistance Studies, who conducted fieldwork in Palestine in the early 1990s, conducted interviews with women from members of charitable associations, women's committees, Christians and Muslims, secular women and Islamists, who were involved in Palestinian women's movements.⁹⁸ In her essay, “The Palestinian Women's Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges,”⁹⁹ Abdulhadi stresses that the sociopolitical context in which women were raised and how it influenced feminist discourse of the region. She argues that the Palestinian women's political roles emerged through revolutionary movements and initiatives in the 1990s, in order to articulate voices to women and present their unconventional views, which aim to critique and defy the old strategies and policies issued by the PLO authorities. Moreover, these new voices and views, were differentiated women from their previous roles and position in the Palestinian society, as well as the adoption of new strategies and ideas, contributed to the development and exaltation of the women's movements.

In particular, Abdulhadi analyzes the three main influences and reason behind the development of the female movement, namely the pre-existing cultural context of gender hierarchy, the existing local conditions, and the international and regional developments.¹⁰⁰ Her discussion of the feminist “paradigm of difference” recognizes diversity in women's experiences and acknowledges that these experiences are shaped by the intersection of multiple systems of oppression, and secondly, she observes, the changes in

⁹⁷ Holt, 236.

⁹⁸ Abdulhadi utilized several networks based in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem as well as women from towns, villages, and refugee camps.

⁹⁹ Rabab Abdulhadi, “The Palestinian Women's Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges,” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 6, Special Issue: *Gender and Social Movements*, Part 1 (December, 1998) 649-673.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 653.

the sociopolitical context as influencing and shaping the emergence, dynamics, and the future course of the female movements.¹⁰¹ Abdulhadi contends, “The context shaping Palestinian national and gender dynamics, is not limited to the boundaries of a single state, rather, it includes local, regional, and international politics,”¹⁰² thus, the discussion that political constraints and opportunities are unique to the national context in which they are embedded, is inadequate, owing to the fact that, the Palestinians have been dispersed throughout the Middle East and the world, since 1948. At last, she argues that, “the changing international, regional, and local conditions, intervened at different stages to open windows of opportunities for Palestinian women to resist the multiple oppressions to which they were subjected, as well as that the changing political context, such as the Israel-PLO Accord and the emergence of the Palestinian National Authority, shaped gender dynamics in different ways. The emphasis in Palestinian feminist discourses and actions shifted away from resistance to the occupation and grassroots activism (during the *Intifada*¹⁰³).”¹⁰⁴

The above passage reveals that women’s political initiatives and participation in peace negotiations took a turn after the occurrence of major events that affected both the private lives of the Palestinian people and the international community. These new conditions, including the loss of territory, the displacement of thousands of people and the gender dynamics, are discussed and presented by the authors of the four memoirs as well. A deeper understanding of the process of documenting Palestinian women’s political activities and involvement is discussed in Suha Sabbagh’s essay, “Palestinian Women Writers and

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 651.

¹⁰² Rabab Abdulhadi, “The Palestinian Women's Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges,” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 6, Special Issue: *Gender and Social Movements*, Part 1 (December, 1998,) 651.

¹⁰³ Meaning Uprising.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 670.

the Intifada.”¹⁰⁵ Sabbagh observes the “hidden forces,”¹⁰⁶ a term she uses to describe Palestinian women, who contributed and played a significant role, during the first *Intifada*, in 1987. She examines the political role of women in Palestine, through several personal writings, novels and autobiographies of authors such as Soraya Antonius, Raymonda Hawa Tawil, Kumari Jayawardena and Sahar Khalifeh. The main assumption that Sabbagh found in these writings is that “gender conditions experience of the occupation,”¹⁰⁷ and how patriarchal structures limit certain aspects, practises and attitudes within Arab society, in which the authors were living and writing.

Notably, Sabbagh explores a very specific time period of women’s political participation, and this is the first *Intifada*, in 1987, where the scholar stresses that “the *Intifada* can be read as initiating a process of liberation in a psychological sense. For Palestinian women, this sense of liberation takes place on two fronts: the fact of participating in the *Intifada* leads women to first, recognize the need to question their position vis-a-vis patriarchal domination, and secondly, given the influence women exert within the home, it is not difficult to imagine that their participation in the public sphere will have long-term repercussions on gender relations within the family, the exact nature of which remains to be seen.”¹⁰⁸ The authors whom Sabbagh discusses do not pose or show any direct challenge to the central patriarchal paradigm, rather in their feminist and nationalist approach; each one of them seeks to incorporate the role of women into the national picture. Sabbagh concludes by stating, “Many women on the West Bank and Gaza have voiced their hope that the gains made by women and their contributions will become a platform for negotiations,

¹⁰⁵ Suha Sabbagh is a Palestinian writer. She is the former director of the Institute for Arab Women's Studies in Washington, DC. Sabbagh came to the US to complete her education, studying, and then teaching, art history in La Crosse, Wisconsin. In the '70s, she moved to Madison to obtain her doctorate in comparative literature. Studying theories of society and culture. <http://www.arabwomenwriters.com/index.php/2014-05-03-16-02-36/2014-05-03-16-37-04/suha-sabbagh> (accessed date: May 4, 2015.) Suha Sabbagh, “Palestinian Women Writers and the Intifada,” *Social Text*, No. 22 (Spring, 1989,) 62-78.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 64.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 63.

once a political solution is reached...women's demands will then receive the same priorities, as the multiplicity of factions within the umbrella of the PLO.”¹⁰⁹

By the same token, Samira Haj, in her essay, “Palestinian Women and Patriarchal Relations,”¹¹⁰ discusses the patriarchal relations of the Arab-Palestinian society, and how these structures have shaped or transformed the daily lives of women in Palestine, especially amidst the Israeli occupation and the efforts for the national liberation struggle, on behalf of the Palestinians. Haj examines the proletarianization of the Palestinian community or population in the Gaza Strip and West Bank and conducted a field research in Palestine and in particular she focused on Palestinian women. She highlights a new generation of young women who seek to challenge patriarchal limitations that society imposes on them, mainly through their diligent involvement in politics.¹¹¹ Moreover, she claims that the Israeli occupation, enabled the deterioration of the status of rural women, and alongside the proletarianization process of the population, contributed to both economic progress and development of the region, nor the breakdown of the patriarchal relations and restrictions imposed on the daily life of Palestinian women. In her analysis, Haj discusses Deniz Kandiyoti’s discussion of patriarchy, where the focus is on patriarchy’s variations, and namely, the internalization and reproduction of women's subordination, issues of power, the family affairs, the kinship ties and female sexuality, in order to investigate the oppression, exploitation and subordination of Palestinian women, in comparison with men or by their male compatriots. Haj states, “Palestinian men are also exploited, oppressed, and barred from positions of power, and therefore, it is not just gender but gender as a social relation and its interaction with other social relations and activities that defines the

¹⁰⁹ Sabbagh,78.

¹¹⁰ Samira Haj, “Palestinian Women and Patriarchal Relations,” *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Summer, 1992) 761-778.

¹¹¹ Haj also argues that the market economy, especially in the case of Palestinian women, did not result in economic progress or development for Palestine and its people, as many economists had expected.

perspectives, self-definitions, and mutual interactions of Palestinian men and women.”¹¹² In this analysis, emphasis is placed on family and gender relations with respect to their cultural and historical contexts and more so the impact of other structures of domination which help construct and shape women's political consciousness and self-organization.

To sum up, Peteet and Kanaaneh’s analyses focus on tangible experiences and testimonies of people who have lived and survived wars as well as providing a framework for the political active role that the women have played and continue to play, within their communities and in higher positions of authority. Thus, they serve as a solid background for this thesis, since they conceptualize women’s issues that will be explored in the following chapters of this study. Moreover Khalidi’s and Massad’s works provide this study will invaluable knowledge on the identity issue and its preservation, which will be attended to in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

The next chapter turns to the notion of “Palestinianness,” as understood, adopted and implemented by the women of Palestine. The authors highlighted in this thesis could be characterized as eyewitnesses, which means they can offer authentic and credible narrations of Palestinian history, identity, and activism. Notably, the subject of identity and how it was developed and preserved by Palestinians is examined and analyzed as well as a brief history of the political engagement and initiative of the Palestinian women is provided. In this chapter, the contribution of the four women authors to the construction of a gendered Palestinian identity will be discussed and analyzed.

¹¹² Haj, 765.

CHAPTER TWO

Construction and Preservation of Palestinian Identity

This chapter aims to highlight the development of a national political identity and its adaptation by Palestinian women, who were actively working against the occupation and towards a reciprocal resolution with the Israelis. This section mainly includes excerpts from the memoirs as regard to each author's experience of situations such as curfews, checkpoints, detentions, riots, and arrests, while seeking to preserve their identities. These particular quotes from each memoir concern and convey important messages and information about the limitations imposed on Palestinians by Israeli authorities in addition to the traditional society and values with these women were raised, regarding their own development as career women, as political activists as well as towards their efforts in preserving and exalting the Palestinian identity. The common theme of struggling for preservation of Palestinian identity can be identified in these four women's memoirs through the narration of the continual threats and uncertainties that the authors endured and now discuss in descriptions of life inside the West Bank. Moreover, these passages attempt to explore the efforts and emotions of the authors especially during historically important events, including face-to-face combat with Israelis. What is more, each author illustrates the strife between Israeli authorities and Palestinians, when the latter's basic human rights are violated. At last, this chapter is arguing that the development and preservation of the gendered political identity was implemented by Palestinian women in an attempt to re-establish themselves within the Palestinian society as its political members and figures. Yet, the construction of the gendered identity is important because it highlights the lack and absence of women participants in the national political front and scene.

Beginning with events such as the Zionist decisive immigration to Palestine, followed by their permanent settlement, that began towards the end of the 19th century, and memorials such as the *al-Nakba*, translated as "catastrophe," and stands for the exodus of the Palestinian Arabs during the 1948 Palestinian-

Israeli war, in which thousands of Palestinians were expelled from their homes in Ramallah, Gaza, Jerusalem and Haifa, it can be inferred that the above events enhanced the development of Palestinian nationalism which is embedded in the Palestinian cause. More importantly the proclamation of the Palestinian identity becomes an issue and calls for national independence, not only among Arabs and Israelis inside the state of Israel but also for recognition and support from the international community.

Brief History of Palestinian Women's Political Participation

Women's political involvement in the Palestinian liberation struggle, which includes numerous initiatives from women of every age, class, educational and religious background, the founding of several organizations, organizing and participating in movements, describes not only the dynamic political context, but also how they became politically engaged at key moments, despite being the subject and target of the Israeli authorities. As these women became the target of mobilization, they began to assume for themselves, political and public identities apart from the private ones as members of a particular kin, ethnic, or tribal community.¹¹³

Namely, Farhat-Naser discusses in *Daughters of the Olive Trees*, Palestinian women residing in Israel were provided with zero opportunities and faced social restrictions, when seeking to pursue political initiatives and become part of region's political or social scene. Farhat-Naser recounts, "Palestinians have only limited influence in Israeli politics. No Palestinian has ever become a minister, and no Palestinian party has ever been asked to take part in forming a government... In the reality of Israeli politics, ethnic affiliation takes precedence over democracy... Palestinians who want to go into politics have to pass a special security examination. Security officials investigate every single member of the family about their

¹¹³ Suad Joseph, "Women and Politics in the Middle East," *Middle East Report 138*, Vol. 16 (January/February, 1986).

membership of a political party, political activity or participation in rallies and demonstrations. This frightens most Palestinians and scares them off.”¹¹⁴

She continued; “Just like us women in the Occupied Territories, Palestinian women in Israel are at even more of a disadvantage than men because they suffer under the social structures of Palestinian society and patriarchal conditions. The Palestinian women’s organizations call on women to go into politics to bring about change. But this is impossible for most of them, they have a job during the daytime and take care of family and run the home in the evening.”¹¹⁵ Farhat-Naser tackles the lack of political structures in the Palestinian society and refers to those who endeavor the establishment of democratic institutions. Precisely, in another part of the memoir the author recounts, “Many human rights organizations and other NGO’s have made efforts to build up a democratic civil society. In particular the women’s movement and the Jerusalem Center for Women have considered it their duty to cooperate this. From the beginning we also applies ourselves to internal questions in order to lay out the foundation for effective political work in the long term... Thus the Jerusalem Center for Women organized courses for mediators and trainers on the subject of education for democracy in 1999 and 2000.”¹¹⁶ At this point, it is significant to include the part in which the Farhat-Naser, refers to the overall behavior behind women’s activities or incentives in just one sentence, particularly, she states that “discrimination against women falls into this category (politics).”¹¹⁷

Historical transformations and changes in Palestinian society have improved the role of women and their efforts in popular struggle and mass action. Palestinian women appeared socially and politically active since early 20th century, by launching organizations, such as the “Palestinian Women’s Association

¹¹⁴ Sumaya Farhat-Naser, *Daughter of the olive trees*, (Germany: Lenos Verlag, 2003,) 135.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 136.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 138.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 139.

for Development,”¹¹⁸ and “Karama Organization,”¹¹⁹ concerning human rights issues, anti-occupation, Palestinian liberation and numerous charitable associations, such as the “Inmaa Association,”¹²⁰ and “Shorouq Society for Women,”¹²¹ with a mission to promote dialogue and peace. Women’s involvement in general altered from its original nature during 1970s, and a growing number of women, who were devoted in the national struggle and were politically engaged in any aspect of the Palestinian politics, emerged in particular. This fundamental shift, contributed to the elevation of women’s political and social status in the society. Principally, “the informal spaces of female participation may be not only gendered-linked, but class-linked. Middle class women may be less likely than working-class women to politically in the streets.”¹²² On the other hand, they are likely to act through formal organizations, political parties, women’s associations, philanthropic organizations, religious institutions and social agencies, as Suad Joseph suggests.

According to sources,¹²³ the first significant female’s political activity occurred in Afula in 1893 when Palestinian women rallied in protest at the establishment of the first Jewish settlement of the time, and repeated it in the Buraq Uprising of 1929, which became an important turning point for many Palestinian women.¹²⁴ These two events, profoundly inspired women to intensify and continue their battles

¹¹⁸ “Palestinian Women’s Association for Development,” *Palestine Summer Encounter* (accessed February, 2015), <http://www.palestinesummer.org/node/250>.

¹¹⁹ “New Perspectives for Young People and Women in Palestine,” Karama Organization (accessed February, 2015), <http://www.karama.org/>.

¹²⁰ “Inmaa Palestinian Charitable Association,” Anna Lindh Foundation, (accessed date February, 2015,) <http://www.annalindhfoundation.org/members/inmaa-palestinian-charitable-association>.

¹²¹ “Shorouq Charitable Society for Women”, *Insight on Conflict*, (accessed date February, 2015,) <http://www.insightonconflict.org/conflicts/israel-palestinian-territories/peacebuilding-organisations/shorouq/>.

¹²² Suad Joseph, “Women and Politics in the Middle East,” *Middle East Report* 138, Vol. 16, (January/February, 1986.)

¹²³ Linah Alsaafin, “The Role of Palestinian Women in Resistance,” *Open Democracy*, April 17, 2014, (accessed date: February, 2015,) <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/linah-alsaafin/role-of-palestinian-women-in-resistance>.

¹²⁴ Dunya Alamal Ismail, “Palestinian Women’s Political Participation,” *Arabglot*, Saturday, November 2, 2013, (accessed date February, 2015,) <http://www.arabglot.com/2013/11/palestinian-womens-political.html> .

and struggle for economic, political and societal change in the region. Especially when the majority of these women activists found themselves as a part of several rounds of arrests, imprisonment, executions, home demolitions, all organized and operated by the British Mandate official of that time. The two Palestinian *Intifadas*, literally meaning “uprising,” signified a series of public outbursts for Palestinian autonomy and national independence.¹²⁵ Occurring between December 1987 to 1991 and September 2000 to 2005, they each had tremendous repercussions for both Palestinians and Israelis. On December 9th of 1987, a traffic incident occurred in the *Jabalia* refugee camp resulted in the killing of four Palestinians, and the rising of a protest movement, involving a “two-fold strategy”¹²⁶ of unarmed resistance and civil disobedience. The resistance was comprised of boycotts of Israeli civil administration institutions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, an economic boycott consisting of refusal to work in Israeli settlements on Israeli products, refusal to pay taxes, general strikes, barricading and throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails at the Israeli Defense Forces and its infrastructure within the Palestinian territories. As a result, large number of Palestinians were killed, thousands were injured, by the Israeli security forces, with the majority of them being youths and civilians under the age of seventeen.¹²⁷ The outcome of this grassroots mass movement was the fact that it empowered Palestinians to enter the negotiations which led to the Madrid Conference in 1991 and the Oslo Agreement in 1993. Nevertheless, the international attention that was given to the Palestinian causes as well as Arafat’s decision to recognize Israel’s legitimacy, to accept all the UN resolutions from 1947, and to adopt the principle of the two-state solution,¹²⁸ as well as the

¹²⁵ Damien McElroy, “Israel-Gaza Conflict, What is an Intifada?” *The Telegraph*, November 6, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/10990699/Israel-Gaza-conflict-What-is-an-intifada.html>. (Accessed date: February 28, 2015.)

¹²⁶ Margolies Beitler Ruth, *The Path to Mass Rebellion: An Analysis of Two Intifadas* (USA: Lexington Books, 2004.)

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Shlaim Avi, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: Norton, 2001.)

exposure of the Israeli police and military brutality targeted to the Palestinian civilians, resulted in an overall feeling of unrest, distrust and disappointment by the Palestinian community.

Some years later, in September 2000, the second Palestinian uprising against Israel broke out, causing a long period of intensified Israeli-Palestinian violence. It all started with Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount that was seen by the Palestinians as a provocative act, as it is considered the third holiest site in Islam.¹²⁹ The excessive usage of tear gas and rubber bullets by the Israeli army towards Palestinian demonstrators and civilians had as a result numerous casualties of both sides. Namely, several targeted killings, suicide bombings, gunfire and air attacks, developed into an estimated death toll of three thousand Palestinians and one thousand Israelis. Once again the Palestinians were left devastated after the second round of violence and with several casualties by the end of the second uprising in February 2005, when President Mahmood Abbas and the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon agreed to stop the violence and commit to the peace talks and further negotiations. Further, an aftermath of the second *Intifada*, was the construction of the Israeli West Bank barrier, and the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.¹³⁰

Finally, it is important to refer to another passage from the memoirs, which reveals and encompasses the significance of writing and publishing a Palestinian memoir, which not only includes historical information about the occupation and the conflict alone but also, reflects the author's character and psychology during major events as well as women's in particular and Palestinian community's in general political contribution and intervention. Notably, in the memoir of Hanan Ashrawi, *This Side of Peace*, in the first pages of the author's note, she details, "Palestinian- Israeli enmity had been taken for granted as an ongoing fact of life and violence was the daily fare...the struggle for peace has been long and difficult. Officially it was launched on October 30, 1991 in the Spanish city of Madrid...If I have taken

¹²⁹ Pearlman Wendy, *Occupied Voices: Stories of the Everyday Life from the Second Intifada*, (New York: Nation Books, 2003,) xxiii.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

the liberty of using my own story as a vehicle to convey a reality much larger than myself, I ask for indulgence. The narrative cannot be detached from the narrator. Nor can the first person singular pronoun replace the plural in the composite experience of a nation.”¹³¹ Thus, the above passage informs about and highlights the collective efforts of the Palestinian nation to stand against their occupiers and the current state of occupation, by uniting themselves into a single political identity.

Excerpts and Passages on “Palestinanness” from Memoirs

Specifically, there are examples of the identity issue in the four memoirs that this thesis analyses, and thus their referencing is important. To begin with, Hanan Ashrawi employs an example from linguistics and Semitic tradition, regarding the process of giving names and defining the meaning of objects, animals and people. Namely, she recounts “the giving of a name is a sign of power, an exercise of authority... establishing a relationship of domination and a hierarchy not unrelated to the human quality of language creativity... Israelis went so far as to explicitly deny our existence, consistent with the myth of ‘a land without people for a people without a land’, we refused to extend to them the verbal acknowledgement of ever mentioning the word ‘Israel’ or ‘Israelis’, in any public or formal speech or tract.”¹³² Additionally, the author explains that when one utilizes words, which refer to people or countries, runs the risk of legitimizing or admitting the other’s existence and reality. Thus, by avoiding to pronounce certain words and names, resulted in “a history of mutual exclusion”¹³³, absurd politics of identity and negation of both ethnic communities. Later in her narration, Ashrawi explains that “to the Israelis, the word ‘Palestine’ was taboo because it also meant an admission of guilt and historical culpability, as well as

¹³¹ Ashrawi, 9-15.

¹³² Ibid., 133

¹³³ Ibid.

recognition of a national identity that might one day be translated into the Palestinian state.”¹³⁴ To conclude, Ashrawi states in the following quote, where she refers to her compatriots and homeland that is deprived of an official and legitimized national identity, “To us all, Palestine is a composite of history and myth, of memories and dreams, of nostalgia and visions, of possession and loss. Its loss has touched us all and imprinted us with melancholy and fierceness. We claimed the law and broke the law, stayed on the land and went to exile... we have been offered back fragments of our dismembered land, to be pieced together slowly...”¹³⁵

Similarly, Raymonda Hawa Tawil in the memoir entitled *My Home My Prison*, recounts “As a Palestinian, my nationalist attachment is strong and it gives me a sense of belonging... I am deeply attached to Palestine, to its hills and fields, its pure air and bright sunshine, its sounds and scents... it seems almost unimaginable that anything could come between me and this country... and yet, in my frustration with my existence, I began to feel that even the landscape was part of my prison.”¹³⁶ In attempt to convey the sentimental attachment to the land, that follows her existence and thus identity, the author employs the features and characteristics of the region and describes how the human element is part and parcel of a land. Specifically, the identity according to Hawa Tawil’s memoir is embodied in the soil of a particular country/land, thus the author and her compatriots realize and understand their existence through a sense of belonging to a particular land.

Another interesting viewpoint from Hanan Ashrawi’s memoir, is when she chronicles the negotiations between the Palestinian and Jordanian delegations and the Americans, particularly the State Department, concerning the two-track approach of the overall negotiations with the Israeli authorities.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 133

¹³⁵ Ibid. 134.

¹³⁶ Tawil, 68.

Namely, she recounts “We came to negotiate on the basis of the two-track approach, Arab-Israeli and the Palestinian- Israeli, not to fall between the tracks...The State Department refused to open the doors to a separate room for the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, so we had another battle on our hands. By locking the door, the United States had begun by taking sides. Armed with the Letter of Invitation and the Letter of Assurance, we challenged the Americans to honor their own commitments, but were flatly told to ‘work it out with the Israelis.’ The two-track approach remained a mono track and we refused to enter the one room left open by the State Department for simultaneous Jordanian-Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. This merging of tracks meant a merger of national identities, and we were not prepared to abandon ours. ‘All we were asking for now is a separate track, not a separate state. We demand the opportunity and our right to sit face to face with our occupiers and address them directly as equals. We want to look them in the eye and say, ‘We are a people with rights, with national identity, and we demand our freedom,’ I declared but no avail.”¹³⁷

The above passage reveals the incisive character and stance of Ashrawi towards conflict circumstances concerning the land of Palestine, the existence of Palestinians as an ethnic community as well as the debate over their national identity. The author continues with the events occurred after the 1967 war, where she recounts “ ‘the Palestinian Question’ whether we would ever have our land restored, had become a personal issue...overnight I had become an ‘exile,’ and most of my family remained under occupation. The urge to go home became my overriding motivation.”¹³⁸ Nevertheless, Suad Amiry in her memoir discusses the peculiar facts and instances that occur when one who possesses or not a Palestinian identity card and documentation, is encountering the Israeli police roadblocks and the security checkpoints. She provides in her account an example of these challenging and odd daily situations, by recounting her own experience with her dog. Namely, Amiry’s dog acquired the official Palestinian

¹³⁷ Ashrawi, 161-162.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 25.

certificate and passport after a visit to the vet, while the author herself did not have one at that time, thus it was extremely difficult to travel around Israel and in the Occupied Territories of Palestine without proper documentation. Through this example, the author discusses and illustrates the preposterous facts and consequences of not possessing official Palestinian certificates or passports and the way the Palestinians were rendered by the Israeli authorities as people who do not belong to any particular or official nation-state, and thus they were treated as illegal.

Notably, Amiry recounts her dialogue with the vet and her thoughts over the dog's Palestinian passport, by arguing:

I do not think either of them knew how difficult or impossible it is for Palestinians to acquire a Jerusalem ID, let alone a Jerusalem passport. I was thinking of my Jerusalemite friend Nazmi Jubeh whose wife, Haifa, had spent sixteen years waiting for her Jerusalem ID. I would definitely have to hide Nura's (the dog) passport from Samir Hulieleh, who after twenty-four years of marriage to Sawsan, a Jerusalemite, had not yet succeeded in getting a Jerusalem ID. I was thinking of the tens of thousands of Palestinians who have lost their Jerusalem ID's and the many others who have been waiting in vain for years to acquire a Jerusalem ID. And there was little Nura (the dog) with a Jerusalem passport...You know what Nura? This document will get you through the checkpoint into Jerusalem while I and my car need two different permits to get through.¹³⁹

The above passage reveals Amiry's comical and joyful nature of narration of circumstances which are indeed serious and problematic, alongside her personal thoughts and emotions on the plight of her friends, extended family and other Palestinians, regarding the documentation and the necessary certificates, in order to be rendered equal to Israeli citizens and thus to be free to travel and move around the Palestinian occupied territories and Israel. As a matter of fact, the success of these memoirs, as this thesis examines,

¹³⁹ Amiry, 106-108.

lies in the intimate narration of events that includes both private and family affairs during conflictive situations, and in highlighting the importance of eyewitnesses to daily moments of fear, dislocation and occupation's atrocities on the whole. At last, the next section provides the history of women's political involvement in Palestine as chronicled and recorded by scholars, historians and anthropologists. The scientific and scholarly views along with the information provided by Palestinian-based organizations, sufficiently highlight the political background of Palestinian women's first steps in the national political scene.

These above excerpts have facilitated the process of addressing and highlighting Palestinian women's lived reality as well as how four Palestinian women in particular contributed to the construction of a gendered Palestinian identity, through an examination of their memoirs. This chapter has argued that the notion of "Palestinianness" and the construction and preservation of the Palestinian identity is deeply-embedded in the daily lives of Palestinians. Through every activity related to the liberation and the national cause, the Palestinian community ultimately produced a new political identity, which was also enhanced and embraced by the notion of "Palestinianness," which is a benchmark for the Palestinians to unite and fight for their rights. As a result, the development and preservation of the Palestinian political identity was an issue that affected the Palestinian women profoundly. Yet, this advancement of developing a gendered political identity is inextricably intertwined with the emergence of a new Palestinian mentality, which focuses and works against the Israeli occupiers and oppression, and combines the efforts and the dynamic of the national liberation struggle with the daily short range conflicts among Palestinian and Israeli citizens.

CHAPTER THREE

Balancing Family and Political Life

This chapter aims to discuss the role of family as an institution, a crucial factor and a source of influence, which is well-embedded in every single person's life and usually describes as well as justifies one's motives, initiatives and actions. It also examines how these four women authors constructed a gendered Palestinian identity through balancing their familial and political objectives. This subject of family is important because mostly, people discuss and explore the Palestinian nation only through the lens of the conflict, occupation and warfare and thus they neglect the fact that Palestinian women and their roles as political activists, conscious citizens and mothers are all part of the Palestinian nation. Thus, this chapter signifies how Palestinian women activists, achieved to construct their own political identity and partook in the Palestinian liberation struggle, by defying patriarchal norms and traditions of the Palestinian society.

Particularly, as it is shown and discussed in the memoirs that this thesis examines, family and family affairs, most of the times, have driven, influenced and guided these four authors toward the development of their political consciousness, enhanced the preservation of their national identity and at last, have instilled in each woman author the idea of an equal society, wherein everyone works against gender biases, prejudices and oppression. However, this is not always the case and not every single Palestinian woman receives the support and full acceptance of her actions and ideas, from her family members, moreover, one cannot disregard the fact in some cases, the husbands are a constant reminder of the traditions and position of women in Palestinian society. Thus, the main point of this chapter is to illustrate how Palestinian women have worked against an oppressed family environment and managed to achieve gender equality in the Palestinian society, through the construction of a gendered Palestinian identity and an active political role and engagement in the national politics. Yet, the authors are dealing in their narratives, mainly with the issue of tradition and morality of women, within the, as they suggest, patriarchal society of Palestine;

thus they produce certain conclusions on how society, where family is an extension of it, views and thinks about women and their position within it. To begin with, an introduction to the institution of family and how it is perceived within the Palestinian society is required.

According to the Institution of the Middle East Understanding (IMEU)¹⁴⁰ the family institution is defined as the most important unit in Palestinian society. The IMEU contends,

The Palestinians' political experience and reality have served to further strengthen family ties. With no real government-sponsored social safety-net, and with the lack of a functioning economy or enough independent government institutions or even enough banks to provide home or student loans, Palestinians have had to rely on family and neighbors to fill the gaps. The family serves as the primary source of identity and extended families live together in compounds or villas divided into apartments for all male sons and their families. Family identification and solidarity can be seen as the one traditional structure to have survived the Nakba.¹⁴¹

Additionally, “the children are raised with a sense of responsibility to family members. Older parents and grandparents rely on the financial support and care of their children and grandchildren.”¹⁴² Further, one of the aftermaths of the *Nakba*¹⁴³ in 1948, was the dispossession and displacement of numerous Palestinians, that created a tidal wave of events and changes, such as the loss of a homeland and the emergence of refugee camps in the neighboring countries, thus the old social norms and customs have been challenged

¹⁴⁰ IMEU, <http://imeu.org/topic/category/west-bank>.

¹⁴¹ Institute for Middle East Understanding, “Social Customs and Traditions,” June 26, 2006, <http://imeu.org/article/social-customs-and-traditions>.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ The term *Al-Nakba*, stands for the Palestinian exodus of 1948 during the first Palestinian-Israeli war and describes the mass expulsion and displacement of 700.000 Palestinian Arabs from the land of Palestine.

or altered. Nevertheless, women had to learn from an early age how to conduct within the strict limits and restrictions in which the Palestinian society was built upon. Namely, the husbands of the four authors, most of the time, appear to be life partners, affectionate and supportive towards the decisions that their wives are taking, although, throughout the narrations there are a lot of moments of anger, frustration and quarrels mainly toward their wives' outdoor active political involvement. The men, in the memoirs, are described as husbands who tend to protect and save their wives from being attacked by Israeli army or officials, mainly during demonstrations. However, the authors, as wives show a whole different attitude towards who is protecting whom. Each of the authors grew up in family structures in which fathers and/or brothers did not hamper both their family life and their political ascent and drive.

This section illustrates, the stories of people, who experienced displacement in an early age, away from siblings and family members, living in neighboring countries, but instead managed to reunite and continue with their lives in their homeland. The authors of these four particular memoirs, were deprived of entrance into their cities and villages, which led to constant frustration and anxiety of the predicament they found themselves in. Moreover, through these memoirs, each author discusses issues and provides information as regard, the numerous checkpoints and roadblocks, which created a daily commotion to their daily lives, and some instants of discrimination and violation of basic human rights. Thus, the above information are leading to further answers as to how have these four Palestinian women authors contributed to the construction of a gendered Palestinian identity, through the lens of the family and familial lives of each of the authors.

In each memoir, the women do not forget their role as wives, daughters and mothers. They obtain strength and courage from their relatives, children and husbands to continue and to maintain balance between personal and professional life under harsh circumstances. The significant role of family is crucial to these narratives, not only because the four authors are affected and somehow accountable for their

practices and behaviors to their family members and partners but also due to the valuable information that one can extract from the personal relations and general family affairs of the four women with their family members. When one studies the family affairs and the influence that the people surrounding a person, have on him/her, then can conclude to several points as to how the family institution shapes and inspires a person and instills certain ideals. Particularly, as shown in the memoirs, the four women have had a close relationship with their family members and yet, these women have created a distinct political consciousness and mentality.

It is important to state at this point, that the family role is being examined in this thesis, because it provides it with intimate information about the protagonists, who are real people, with strong emotions and moments of frustration and meltdowns, who record their lives during an extraordinary occupation of their country, but at the same time, they lead a normal life with their families and continue with their jobs and careers, amidst the general conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, in these four particular memoirs, one encounters, the loving husbands (although not always in the case of Raymonda Hawa Tawil), the children and the overprotective parents, who all play a key role in the story and are shaping each of these authors feelings and behavior towards life and resistance. The unprecedented initiative, of woman taking actions and becoming involved in national resistance and in politics, in spite of the fact that the society in which they were born and raised did not allow for such “innovations” on behalf of women, is discussed in each memoir and constitutes a large part of their narration.

Consequently, one understands that family life played a key role in the individual authors’ struggles to balance their political activism and their roles as mothers and wives. Furthermore, the authors very often refer to their mothers and describe them as women who were deeply instilled and inspired with values such as freedom, justice, human rights and freedom of speech. It is not a surprise that all of these four women, have an active political role in their community and not only that, but for Hanan Ashrawi,

their influence and determination was made known internationally. They share the fact that, as women living in an Arab society with its restrictions and prohibitions, these women authors are setting high goals and take part in activities which can easily turned out disastrous for their safety and their status in the Palestinian society. Moreover, it is worth mentioning at this point that their educational status and their careers allowed for them to be more actively involved and to appear fearless contrary to their female compatriots.

To be more specific, these women despite the fact that they spent a lot of time separated from their parents and siblings, in neighboring countries, deprived of parental daily affection and rather homesick, they nevertheless decided to return in Palestine and start their lives and careers anew. Considering the fact that they had to readjust to a whole new reality, and forget life as they knew it, away from their home cities and dispersed all around Israel with Israeli neighbors, claiming their homeland as theirs, these women managed to become successful both in their family and personal lives as well as career women. In the memoir of Raymonda Hawa Tawil titled *My Home My Prison*, she recounts the prominent role played by women in the resistance that made a strong impact on the Palestinian society. Namely, she narrates, “I made it a regular habit to attend the sessions of the Nablus military court...In the past, an Arab father’s principal concern was for his daughter’s ‘honor’ in other words for her virginity...Throwing aside conventional thinking, the families gave their full moral support to the young girls in the resistance. Fathers cared more for their daughter's’ strength of character in facing the ordeals imposed by the occupation authorities than for the old concepts of ‘honor’ or ‘disgrace.’ Honor lies in defending the motherland, and fathers were proud to have daughters in the resistance...‘These girls are the spirit of the revolution’ said one sheikh whose niece was a resistance member.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Tawil, 131-132.

The above passage informs and reveals the exceptions that were made by some traditional families and mainly fathers towards their daughters' initiatives and engagement in activism. Further, Tawil explores through this passage the unprecedented change that took place in the Palestinian society concerning the participation of women in the national resistance movements against the occupation. Subsequently, it is an important claim that Tawil is making in her memoir and adds to what this thesis is questioning, regarding the contribution of Palestinian women in the national politics, through the development of a gendered political identity, by making clear that Palestinian women had indeed played a vital role in forming and organizing the resistance.

In the memoir titled *Sharon and my Mother in-law*, Saud Amiry details the “adventures” of collecting her mother in-law, who resides near President’s Arafat Ramallah-based compound, during five consecutive curfews in 2002. Amiry, illustrates this particular incident of collecting her mother in-law to her house, in an attempt to convey the emotions of lay people who struggle to adjust to a new reality with “new” neighbors, behaviors and policies, from a government and an army that they were not given the opportunity to choose. More precisely, Amiry employs her own experience to describe a general and sometimes even more strenuous situation, in which most of her compatriots and friends found themselves in. She does not disregard the fact that as a daughter in-law, she has fixed and explicit responsibilities towards her ninety one years old mother in-law.

It is worth taking into consideration the fact that, Amiry throughout her narrative, covers the complexity and discomfort that characterizes family affairs and relationships with family members. Remarkably, the author recounts the exact minute when her mother in-law encounters Amiry at the door of her house, after waiting for a couple of hours for the lifting of the curfew, where she, utterly anxious and worried, turns to Amiry and says “Where the hell were you?, I have been waiting for you. They lifted the curfew twice and I waited for you, but you did not come; we have had no electricity, no water, no

telephone; shelling day and night; the food in the fridge is all rotten, all the neighbours ran away and there is only Um Jamil and Zakiyyeh here, three helpless women...I am coming with you...The army is surrounding the building and we have to move quickly.”¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Amiry discusses the everyday life of cohabitation with her mother in-law, and the moments of impatience and anger, created and developed by the overall tense environment of military curfews and regular checking in houses.

Namely, the above-mentioned incident describes not only the state of curfews and occupation’s complexities but also informs about the relationship between the author and her mother in-law, which is characterized by numerous arguments and quarrels; since Amiry bears the responsibility of taking care of her old mother in-law; due to the fact that she is a woman and thus her husband cannot “intervene” in such issues, according to Amiry’s narration. Thus, Amiry undergoes this difficult and risky situation of collecting her mother in-law and transfer her at a safer place, with her being all alone without any help from the male members of her family. Moreover, the above segment shows that women were considered by the men as those who, exclusively, have to deal with the family issues and as those who had the responsibility of taking care of the elders in the family.

The following passage concerns and informs about Raymonda Hawa Tawil’s attitude toward occupation and women’s revolutionary activities. She is taking a stand against the incompetence, fear and the directions that were given to women, by their families or their husbands, to stay silent and distance themselves from political revolutionary initiatives. Further, the excerpt from Hawa Tawil’s memoir, helps in situating the overall subject of this thesis which is the emergence and development of a gendered Palestinian political identity, and thus it can be argued that women regardless of the limitations and oppositions, that they were initially facing and encountering from their family members, they managed in

¹⁴⁵ Amiry, 136.

the end to stand out and organize themselves against the occupation with the formation of resistance movements. The excerpt below indicates the multi-faceted situation of women in Palestine.

The intriguing excerpt is when she expresses her thoughts on the state of occupation alongside the Palestinian family values and directions, that one cannot escape from, and how it has affected and worsened the lives of women. She writes, “I myself would begin to conform inwardly, succumbing to the pressure from outside and to my own despair. I saw Arab women digging their own graves, rationalizing their oppression... We Arab women are taught hypocrisy, schizophrenia is our normal state.”¹⁴⁶ On the contrary, the author continues with examples of particular women who took part in the popular resistance and helped to set the stage for a fearless female participation, specifically, the author details the example of Rasmiyah Oudeh and heroines “of her caliber radicalized all Palestinian women, this new revolutionary consciousness overshadowed the differences between men and women, sweeping away hidebound traditions... We encountered less male antagonism against women taking an active political role... The first large protest action by women took place in 1968, after the Israeli authorities arrested a large number of resistance members, including some thirty women, mostly girls in their late teens or early twenties. The women were brutally tortured under interrogation.”¹⁴⁷ As it is presented in the above excerpt, it was the violence and the mistreatment imposed on Palestinians who were arrested by Israeli authorities, that discouraged women from taking active political role in the past; yet this very same fear also galvanized them, in becoming the focus and the principal channel of protests. Moreover, “these groups (women’s organizations) now took on tasks they had never dreamed of before”¹⁴⁸ by organizing protests.

¹⁴⁶ Amiry, 67.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹⁴⁸ Tawil, 134.

Political engagement and participation in the national resistance against the occupation were however not the only activities in which the authors were involved. As previously mentioned they were in charge not only of several peace and women's associations and organizations but also were responsible for running their households and taking care of their families. Through these memoirs, one encounters several excerpts in which the authors mention the dual gender role, that of an emancipated, politically active person and the other of the wife, protective mother, daughter and daughter in-law. Key to these roles were also the position and function of the authors' mothers in their personal and social life. In many passages the authors describe how they handled particular expectations and harsh situations and relationships with family members, according to their mothers' wishes and lessons.

Raymonda Hawa Tawil for instance recalled her mother's attitudes and impact, stating "Mother was indeed a woman of great courage. I loved her deeply, and I know that she has been a powerful influence upon me. In many of my thoughts and deeds I have followed in her footsteps, consciously or unconsciously taking her as my model¹⁴⁹... She herself was born in America and spent her early years there. Growing up in that relatively emancipated society, she imbibed ideas of personal freedom quite foreign to Arab traditions... Her behavior incurred considerable criticism from the villagers, who found it far too emancipated for their tastes...Thanks to her, I was never made to feel inferior as a woman."¹⁵⁰ Further, the author recounts "Mother's quest for freedom took her on a path of suffering. She was made to pay the heavy price Arab society exacts from 'rebellious' women; She was deprived of her children, she was not allowed even to see us...in Arab society, children are answerable for the 'misdeeds' of their parents, her 'misdeeds' harms our standing to this very day."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Tawil, 18.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 23

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 24.

Besides the strong impact of the mother, in every aspect of life of Hawa Tawil, another equally important element was meant to play a determinant role during her childhood and that was the constant repression of her personality as a woman in Palestine as well as the exclusion she felt as a child away from her parents as a result of the Israeli occupation. Particularly, she narrates, “Looking back, my life has been a long series of restrictions and prohibitions, which have hampered my freedom, my elementary human right to go to the people and the places that I love. When I was in the convent, I was deprived of my mother; living in Israel, I was cut off from my brothers; later when I moved to Jordan, I was parted from my parents and throughout all these years, wherever I lived, Arab society, with its conventions of masculine domination, has locked me into the prison where the Arab women are condemned to spend their lives...that has been an persistence oppressive theme of my life.”¹⁵² The above passage informs about Tawil’s multi-layered family life and status, which had an impact on her life not only as a child but also as an adult. Notably, in this passage she explores and highlights all those factors and circumstances that ultimately have shaped her personality. The constant feeling of exclusion, displacement and oppression, have inflicted and produced several traumas in her; that she managed to turn into life experiences and lessons. Thus, one understands the vital role of family and why it is important and crucial to this study, the examination of the family affairs of the four women authors, due to the fact that these findings, produce a new understanding on the activities, attitudes and political practices of these women. There four women, having lived under the aforementioned circumstances, managed to develop an environment within the Palestinian society and community, where women had to take a stand and raise their voices against the occupiers and the occupation, in spite of the traditional norms and wishes of their families.

In similar fashion, Ashrawi’s narrative presents parts of the author’s childhood, while she and her sister were separated from the rest of the family, notably, she details, “on June 5, 1967...my sister and I

¹⁵² Tawil, 19.

were students there (Beirut) in Lebanon while most of our family was back home in the West Bank, which was then part of Palestine... a series of events including Israeli raids, expulsion of United Nations troops had left the whole region in a state of suspense...the next few weeks were a succession of nightmares, disasters, and absurdities that shattered my protected universe and irrevocably altered the course of history in the region¹⁵³...the reality of my family's temporary exile in Amman, east of the Jordan river, remained fragments of an incomplete memory to be gradually rediscovered and pieced together in agony and awe."¹⁵⁴ The above passage is another example of the life of Ashrawi as a child, whereby exile, displacement and separation from the parents are again a constant theme. As a result, having these memoirs and endured such experiences, one understand the fervent drive of these people to work against occupation and oppression.

The aforementioned excerpts from the memoirs reveal and enhance the familiar technique and approach, in which these four accounts are written. Finally, this chapter provided sufficient information about the institution of family in Palestine and also on how family affairs are affecting, hampering or enhancing women's political and societal goals and intentions. Yet, this chapter have argued that women succeed in developing their own political identity and mentality in Palestine, and they also took part in several political and peace initiatives in spite of the patriarchal structures of Palestinian society that most of the times preferred women to keep silent in front of major historical transformations that occurred in their homeland. Consequently, the chapter managed to provide answers on how have these four Palestinian women authors contributed to the construction of a gendered Palestinian identity, by arguing that women have gone against the restrictions and limitations that their families and society has set for them and achieved to establish themselves as a symbol of resistance in the Palestinian cause. At last, through the aforementioned excerpts, one understands that these four women authors have had a difficult time in

¹⁵³ Ashrawi, 19.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 22

setting their political goals and ambitions high due to their familial environment. As a matter of fact, Palestinian women in general and the four authors in particular, have managed to preserve their political and national identities by standing out against the public opinion.

CONCLUSION

These four memoirs illustrate how prominent women members of the Palestinian community learned to live with or resist both the occupation and patriarchal structures, all the while attempting to maintain normalcy and balance in their personal and professional lives. The eyewitness narratives of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its major historical transformations, which Palestine and its people endured, provide strong evidence for how each woman contributed to the construction of a gendered Palestinian identity in a male-dominated political scene.

Commenting about gender issues alongside their documentations of their daily lives, these authors contributed to the creation of a new genre of Palestinian women's writings and literature. From their narratives, one not only reads about the history of occupied Palestine and gains insight about the Israeli settlements and violations of human rights, but also gains a deeper understanding of these women's emotions, experiences, frustrations, anxieties, personal lives with husband and children as well as of their political activities and participation despite the dangers that this engagement involves. Thus, these well-documented memoirs, manage to convey personal truths and ample examples of living under occupation. These authors discuss at length the numerous everyday challenges, some of which include the purely physical dangers of traveling in a war zone; successfully passing through several checkpoints; or enduring constant and random interrogations and roadblocks that hinder one's daily activities. These four women were each determined to safeguard the existence of the Palestinian community's identity despite their many pitfalls and challenges.

Through the autobiographical narratives, Hanan Ashrawi, Sumaya Farhat-Naser, Suad Amiry and Raymonda Hawa Tawil chronicle their personal lives, emotions, relationships with their husbands and friends as well as their encounters and cooperation, in some cases, with their Israeli neighbors. Each shared an active political engagement against the occupation and they are united and committed to forging a

reconciliation and furthering negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. What these women share is the strong voice, the sense of justice, and the principles of gratitude and fairness among their families and community. In three chapters this thesis examined, Palestinian identity from the perspectives of elite women who witnessed and experienced firsthand how Palestinian identity was constructed over time and preserved through their own understanding of “Palestinianness.”

Accordingly, the notion of “Palestinianness,” which was a central concern of this thesis became a main issue for the Palestinians due to the fact that it encompasses all these efforts, emotions, achievements and failures of the Palestinian community and its leaders towards peace negotiations and conflict resolution. As discussed in the second chapter, the authors of the four memoirs confess and present, via selected excerpts on political participation, identity, and family, their personal views, memories and emotions with a sense of patriotism. Furthermore, these four women, focused on their neighbors and compatriots’ experiences in the field, their opinions and actions rather than in leaderships of both sides and political figures or international community, mainly due to the fact of what they have experienced in past negotiations, which left them feeling, betrayed and unsatisfied. Encountering hardships through a series of setbacks while living in Palestine made them determined to unite the Palestinian community and work actively in the peacemaking process in order to present to the international community strong and cogent arguments and records of Palestinian existence and daily resistance. By writing their personal accounts, detailing daily life under occupation in Palestine, these authors are painting the picture for the world (international community and English speaking audience), of the actual events and upheavals, as experienced and lived by the Palestinians and not as the Western or Israeli media presented them.

Chapter three focused on the role of family and basically on how family affairs, influence and affect women in Palestine in terms of their political attempts to develop a political identity of their own. As a matter of fact, the family and gender roles as well as the patriarchal structures of the Arab-Palestinian

society are explored. This chapter examined several excerpts from the four memoirs, which each of them elaborated on issues related to the family affairs and personal relationships of the authors with spouses, parents, their children and friends, in an attempt to prove and present how women's political initiatives and practices within the political realm of Palestine was hampered and suppressed by their male counterparts and compatriots. Moreover, the relationship of the authors with their parents and more in particular with their mothers, is discussed through certain excerpts and aims to prove who empowered, encouraged, influenced and shaped these four authors, before and through their political journey. Hence, this chapter uncovered all these personal hesitations that the authors had toward their social position and political life alongside the limitations that were imposed on them by the Arab-Palestinian social structures and norms.

As a result, in all four memoirs, the authors identify themselves as Christian Palestinians; likewise, they all live and work in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, despite being under constant Israeli siege and long term occupation. Similarly, the authors hold or have held key positions within their communities and, at the same time, they were in charge of their households and family affairs. They have had an influential role in the Palestinian civil society, where they have established and led peace and women's organizations and worked alongside their Israeli counterparts, despite the resentment and distrust of their family members and friends that they might have felt. The memoirs examined in this study explore the personal accounts of four Palestinian women, who individually highlight their own contributions, experiences, memories and psychology of life while living under the occupation and throughout the two *Intifadas*.

All four authors effectively participated in the decision-making process of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by supporting the Palestinian Authority and their community's endeavors and by attending the negotiations, which aimed to forge peaceful resolutions between both governments (Israeli and Palestinian). That is achieved by describing their own political and social stances, attitudes and emotion,

towards the Israelis and the consequent events that were taking place, not only as personal accounts but also as political participants and dissidents of Israeli policies and as citizens of a land that has been “questioned” by the occupiers and the majority of the international community. By discussing key themes within their memoirs, such as political engagement, gender roles, and the construction and preservation of the Palestinian identity, they incorporate narrative techniques, such as metaphor, invective language, and oxymoron, to name a few, in order to appeal to history, authority, and nostalgia, and to present a collective voice about those who struggle in silence.

Moreover, these personal narratives managed to present and represent not only the background story of the policies imposed and decisions taken, but also key roles of important figures of the Palestinian authorities and of the Palestinian community as a whole. Notably, as Hanan Ashrawi discusses through her active political engagement and position as the official spokesperson of the Palestinian Authority, but also her own experience and memories of fear for herself and her family, uncertainty for her country, their future as a Palestinian nation, the frequent military curfews as well as the daily conflicts with the Israelis and at last the common future with their occupiers. As Suad Amiry and Raymonda Hawa Tawil discuss in their memoirs, the curfews imposed by the Israeli army, constituted and established a constant reminder of the occupier and those living under occupation, at that particular time, in their country, as well as contributed to what Amiry successfully calls a feeling of constant confinement of “live and souls”¹⁵⁵ in Palestine. By this phrase, Amiry, underscores the immense need and wish of Palestinians to liberate themselves from the occupation and rebuild their own independent nation-state.

These women faced not only the occupier but they also vacillated between their own independence, political engagement and the patriarchal society and family setting in which they were raised. Lastly, as Tawil illustrates in her memoir, the military curfews and detention, which she personally experienced with

¹⁵⁵ Amiry, xi.

an imposed house arrest of one month, has been described as a “state of mind.”¹⁵⁶ The question on how this sub-genre of autobiographical writing¹⁵⁷ contributes to scholarly research and whether the information that one can extract from this form of individual writing are important or sufficient may remain, but is mainly due to how one chooses to engage with the writing itself and the information given. Finally, these particular memoirs do not enhance the feeling of empathy or sympathy of the reading audience with the key characters, yet they aspire to gather historical information from people who have been eyewitnesses to atrocities broached by the Israeli authorities.¹⁵⁸

Finally, by examining and analyzing these key issues, of the emergence of a gendered political identity, the political engagement of Palestinian women and the role of family in the Palestinian society, this thesis not only managed to answer the research question, but also discussed the unique space created by using personal accounts of Palestinian women whose memories became valuable historical records of great significance for the history of Palestine and its people. Moreover, through their writings, they become part of a distinct literary genre that one can discern additional scientific and scholarly viewpoints and theories by examining the Palestinian struggle and its many perspectives by Palestinian women activists who have lived and endured them.

¹⁵⁶ Tawil, 242-250.

¹⁵⁷ Julie Tallard Johnson, “What’ your story? Writing the Memoir,” *Continuing Studies*, (accessed date: December 2014,) <http://continuingstudies.wisc.edu/classes/online-writing-memoir>.

¹⁵⁸ Stephen Lendman, “Incriminating Evidence of Israeli War Crimes in Gaza,” *Steve Lendman Blog*, March 25, 2009, (accessed date: April 2015,) <http://sjlendman.blogspot.gr/2009/03/incriminating-evidence-of-israeli-war.html> .

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